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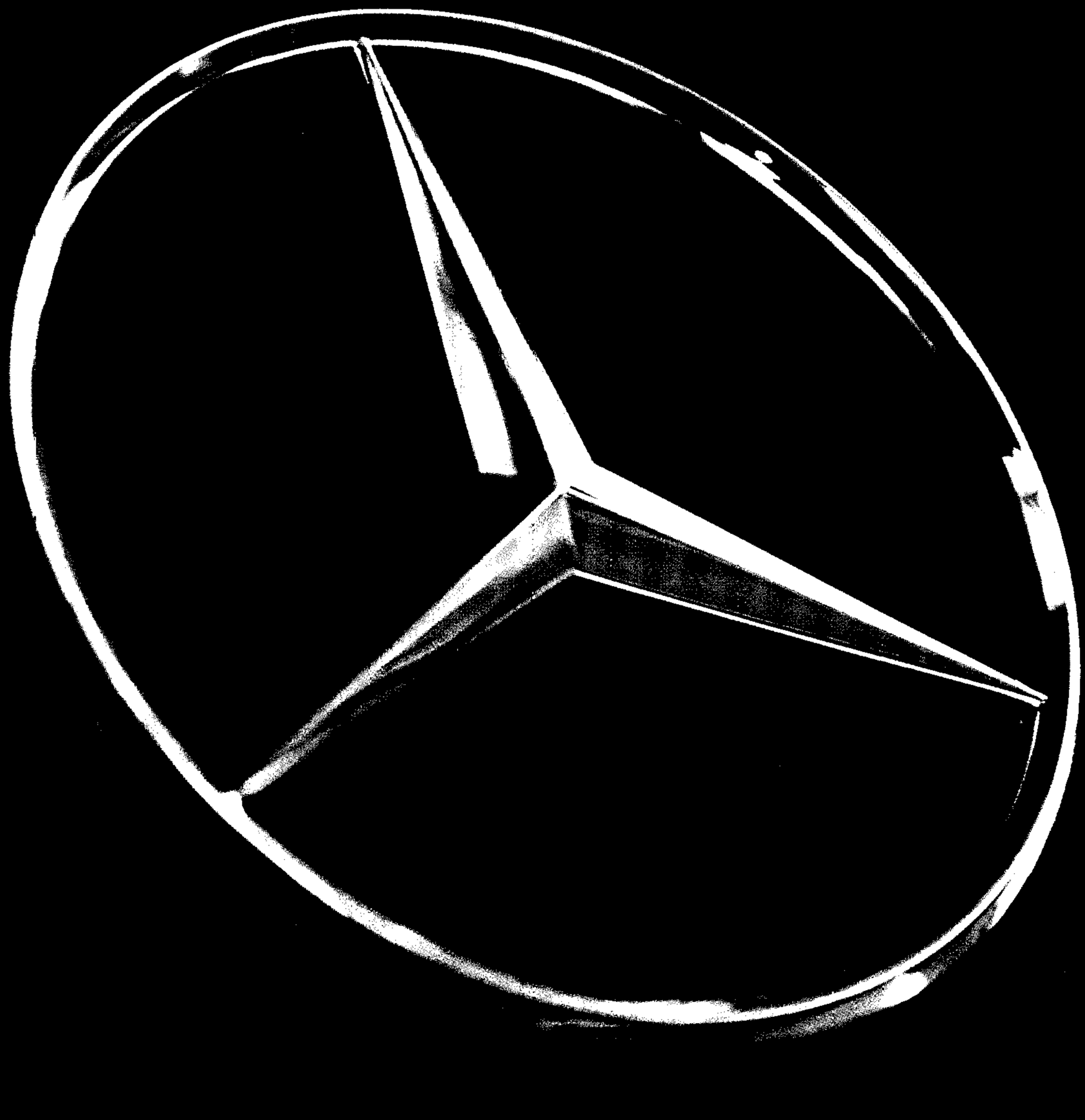

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"I made enough out of Cherie Blair's hair to buy a peerage"

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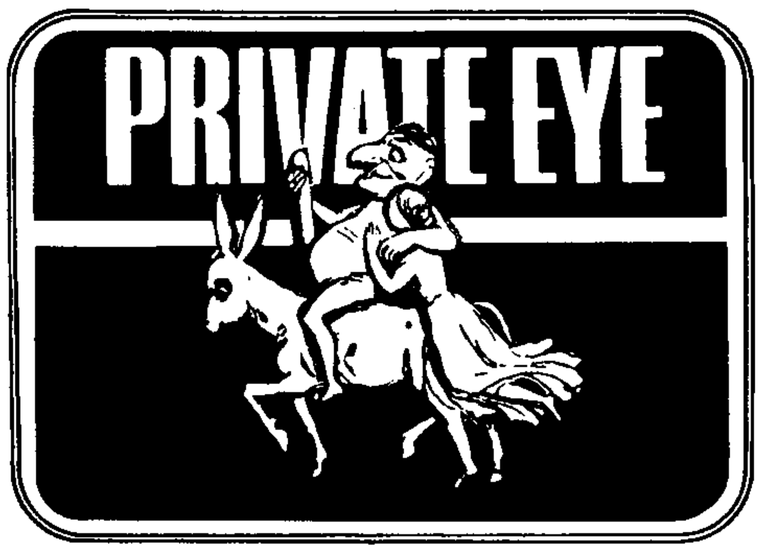

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100 Years Ago

TONY BLAIR surprised many last week when he told suits at the New Health Network that the Tories had been heading in the right direction with their health reforms in the 1980s and 90s – remember the internal market and GP fundholding? – but had failed because of insufficient resources.

This was in sharp contrast to how Labour had berated the evil Tories when the latter were still in power. On 27 April 1995, for example, one furious Labour firebrand stormed: "Is not the effect of government policy on the health service now to pit nurse against nurse, hospital against hospital, doctor against doctor?

"The result will be to divide and rule; and the commercialisation, demoralisation and break-up of the health service, when people want to see the National Health Service run as a proper national service for the people."

And the unreconstructed Bevanite? Why, it was Tony Blair of course.

ONE of the damning charges against Dave Cameron in Labour's chameleon advert is that he worked for a while in commercial PR – portrayed as a decadent world of non-stop champagne and stretch limos. The film suggests that a political animal with such a background is bound to be dodgy, since he has learnt "how to change into any colour he pleases".

But is it wise for Labour to imply that anyone who ventures into the PR business must be an amoral opportunist who lacks all conviction? Tony Blair's chief spin-doctor, David Hill, was previously managing director of PR firm Bell Pottinger Good Relations. Alastair Campbell's former deputy, Tim Allan, went on to found Portland PR. Colin Byrne, ex-head of Labour's press office, is now UK chief executive of Weber Shandwick. Tessa Jowell's special adviser, Sarah Latham, came from Freud Communications. Andrew Hood, former special adviser to Geoff Hoon and Robin Cook, is now a partner at top City PR firm Brunswick. And so on.

The blundering oafs behind the chameleon message have also managed to insult two rather important Labour families. Earlier this year Tony Blair's son Euan did several weeks' work experience at Finsbury Group, a City PR firm. Meanwhile Gordon Brown's wife Sarah was of course the co-founder of Hobsbawm Macaulay, a PR agency. Are they *all* chameleons?

Number crunching

£275 ■ Daily rate of Cherie Blair's hairdresser

£180 ■ Daily rate of member of Committee on Standards in Public Life

THE richest company in Britain for many years was oil giant Shell – until last year when it moved to the Netherlands in a neat tax-dodging trick that involved transferring all its subsidiary companies to an off-the-shelf company set up by tax avoidance advisers at Ernst & Young.

The scam, exposed in *Eye* 1130, will save the company hundreds of millions over the coming years as it enables the firm to stash billions in tax havens without the taxman getting his hands on it.

Ernst & Young was known to have a few more such companies up its sleeve for use by other British multinationals looking to do a similar moonlight flit. It was therefore no surprise when, buried in the detail of last month's budget, the government closed the loophole. There was no suggestion that it would apply only to companies sold the dodge in future, so Shell's wheeze appeared to have been nipped in the bud: its future tax haven profits would be taxed. But when the finance bill was published a couple of weeks ago, lo and behold, companies that have already used the scam are let off the hook!

The only known beneficiary of this concession is Shell. Nobody knows why it has been favoured and HMRC won't say what lobbying it received from the company. Campaigners for a windfall tax on the ever-ballooning profits of big oil might reflect that what tax windfalls there are in fact appear to go *into* the companies' pockets...

BARONESS Dean, aka former union leader Brenda Dean, sits on the Lords Appointments Commission which recently caused Dr Chai Patel such anguish by thwarting his desire for ermine.

It seems this isn't the first time their paths have crossed. In the summer of 1997, when Patel was ousted as chief executive of the nursing-home group Care First in a boardroom power-struggle, one prominent non-executive director at Care First who backed his departure was... Baroness Dean. Spooky!

NEWS

PATHETIQ

QINETIQ's senior directors made tens of millions of pounds from the recent flotation of the former Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. But not everyone has done so well.

A number of staff who were made redundant last year were led to believe they would be allowed to keep their free staff shares as "good leavers", just as retiring workers could keep theirs. This, Qinetiq tells the *Eye*, was "a miscommunication". An unfortunate one, given that the value of those shares shot up after City institutions invested £1.4bn in the firm in February.

Several former employees have been offered ex-gratia compensation but the sum doesn't match the value the shares reached, or indeed could have had in the future. The employees' union says it is dealing with the situation on a case by case basis, but is negotiating with Qinetiq on the former employees' behalf.

Meanwhile Qinetiq's remaining scientists and engineers have been told that the company "cannot afford" the below-inflation 2 percent pay offer they had agreed, due to budget pressures.

NEWS FROM THE SANDPIT

THE defence select committee has requested clarification from Defence Secretary John Reid that "critical shortages" of personnel and kit will not adversely affect the deployment of British troops to Afghanistan.

And a good thing too: the shortages include medical personnel and much else besides.

The entire 16th Air Assault Brigade has been given 10 helicopters to deal with air transport. Six of them are the larger Chinooks, but the other four are rather smaller Lynx types, carrying only 10 troops each. Thanks to maintenance and repair schedules, it's unlikely they'll all be available at any one time. So for 10, read seven or eight.

There's also concern about close air support. Eight Apache attack helicopters will be flown to Hellmand in full view of the British press. But the word is that they will be flown by pilots who, because of "resource restrictions", have been unable to train with the more sophisticated, expensive weapons on board. Good job we are only going in to help with reconstruction.

As for fixed-wing aircraft, the Harrier GR7 squadron based at Kandahar is due to be withdrawn in June, just when most of the lads arrive. They are expected to be replaced by Dutch F-16s, says the Ministry of Defence, but F-16s require a runway and the one at Kandahar is, for the moment at least, buggered.

'Square Basher'

JUST FANCY THAT!

DEFENCE Secretary John Reid certainly made an impression on his last trip to the United States.

At a presentation for American military top brass, Reid thought he would warm up his audience with a joke. Following Condoleezza Rice's trip to Britain, the minister quoted a few of the more lurid tabloid headlines about Rice's love-in with her opposite number Jack Straw.

"This is exactly the kind of special relationship Tony wants us to strike up with our American counterparts," Reid explained, "which is why as soon as this meeting is over, I'll be taking Donald Rumsfeld to the cinema to see *Brokeback Mountain* with me."

Rumsfeld's face had to be seen to be believed.

Street Of Shame

ONCE again there is a conspicuous absentee from the *Sunday Times* rich list. Although it includes non-British citizens who live and work in this country, as well as British citizens abroad, "we exclude Rupert Murdoch... as he is an American citizen and is based in America".

Yet it *does* include foreign citizens based abroad "if they have extensive UK interests", such as Tony O'Reilly. Presumably the Dirty Digger's UK interests don't count as extensive.

In previous years the omission was understandable. If the *ST* gave Murdoch the same close financial scrutiny as other rich-listers, it might have been obliged to note that he has long avoided paying any taxes whatever in the UK, despite running many profitable enterprises here.

But his absence this year means that the paper missed a chance to bring glad tidings for hard-working, tax-paying citizens everywhere: the Inland Revenue has finally got its hands on a bit of the Dirty Digger's cash!

The most recently filed accounts at Companies House for his British holding company, News Corp Investments, reveal that Murdoch's UK business paid £52m in corporation tax for the year ended 30 June 2004 and £48.9m in 2003.

Much of his fortune is still stashed in tax havens, of course, but some of that has also been reached by the long arm of the taxman. How heart-warming to see that the Digger is at last backing the Blair government with cash as well as fawning editorials.

"WHY is the BBC lavishing such grotesque sums on Ross & co?" demands Stephen Glover in the *Daily Mail*, frothing with outrage at the "mind-boggling salaries" paid to broadcasters such as Jonathan Ross.

No such grotesqueries in the *Mail*'s pay-slips, of course. In 2004 editor Paul Dacre took home £1.16m (including a £200,000 bonus) but last year he had to get by on a more modest £997,000.

THE *Mail on Sunday* appeared to be deeply distressed by the discovery that credit company Capital One is offering a card with a spending limit of £25,000.

"This enormous sum, above the average annual wage of £23,400, is the maximum that may be lent on a single card by law," tutted financial hack Helen Loveless, beneath the headline "Card Offer Really Is The Limit". "Capital One's decision to use this figure as an advertising tool at a time when consumer debt is at a record high has attracted strong criticism."

The paper also noted that the company was "notorious for its use of indiscriminate mailings". Well, not so indiscriminate. Bagged up alongside the colour supplements and home furnishing catalogues that accompanied every copy of that week's *Mail on Sunday* (much to the delight of the paper's advertising department, who received a hefty fee in return) was a flier from Capital One offering readers a credit card which would allow them to spend "up to £25,000".

IN HIS *Evening Standard* column Peter Oborne again attacks the Lib Dem-controlled Islington Council – his second such salvo in a month.

But he omits to mention one small fact. At next week's local elections, the Tory candidate for Islington Council's Highbury East ward is one Martine Amelia Oborne – his wife.

THE campaign to "Save the Proper British Café" was tucked into with relish by ravenous hacks last week, with news stories in every paper.

"The owner of George's Café in the heart of Canning Town, east London, has found that young people are drifting away, lured from his chrome tables and fish and chips by the bright lights of McDonald's and other fast food chains," noted the *Telegraph*.

Most papers (except the *Sun*, which tried to claim it had thought the whole thing up itself) pointed out that the campaign was funded by HP Sauce. None, however, saw fit to draw attention to the fine work HP's (American) owner Heinz does on behalf of traditional café culture – it is the sole supplier of tomato ketchup to McDonald's in Britain.

THERE were howls of indignation in the *Mirror* editorial column last week at the decision by Peugeot to close its plant in Coventry with the loss of 2,300 jobs. "Despite Peugeot's bleatings, the Ryton plant made the firm millions in profits. Our labour laws are now so weak the average workforce has little protection from crushing corporate might."

No one knows this better than employees of the *Mirror*'s parent company. In July 2003, Trinity Mirror cut more than 500 jobs and, two years later, it told unions to prepare for a further 700 redundancies. Despite Trinity's "bleatings", in the first half of 2003 it had announced an operating profit of £101.4m. For the same period in 2005, the figure was £128m.

"THROW open the books so that we can see what everyone earns," declared Polly Toynbee in the *Guardian* last week.

"Because the highly paid command the citadels of public debate, they grossly distort the true picture of the way most people live now... Making sense of reward is difficult – but the debate has to begin by throwing open the books. It wouldn't hurt much if everyone had to do it together. Let's see how the culture changes when we can all read each other's tax returns. Why not? What's to hide? The most equal countries do it."

Fair enough. The *Eye* emailed la Toynbee to kick things off, asking what income she declared on her most recent tax return. Here is her reply in full, unedited:

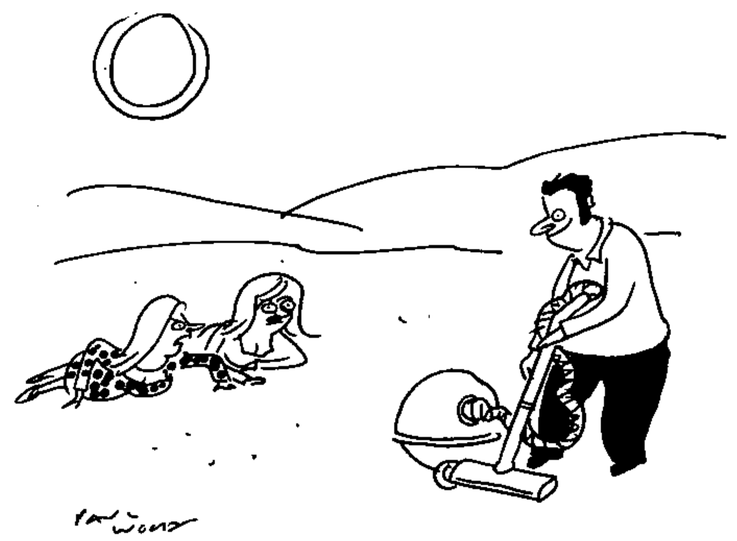
"Nope. An organisation has to do it all together. Why pick ion the ione who advocates openbness and those who want everything to stay secret?"

Worth every penny!

"BARRYMORE may be quizzed again," shrieked the *Sun* over news that Essex police are to re-examine the evidence of the death of Stuart Lubbock in Michael Barrymore's swimming pool five years ago.

"The news follows a campaign for 'justice' by the victim's dad Terry," the paper reported.

This must have been a shock to *Sun* readers who thought the case was closed back on 30 January when the paper unearthed a dossier of "lost evidence" which cleared Barrymore of any wrongdoing and Terry Lubbock appeared on the front page announcing that "I DON'T BLAME YOU, MICHAEL."



"Ignore it... obviously a mirage"

"I'm afraid you'll have to lose your own luggage"

BIZARRE scenes on a recent press trip to South Africa arranged by Freeplay, the wind-up radio firm. Among the Fleet Street hacks in attendance was Ms Alexandra Frean, social affairs correspondent of the *Times*, who startled her hosts by continually taking photos of "Mrs Teddy-Weddy", her beloved cuddly toy, in various locations – on the hotel tortoise, next to some penguins, perching on the edge of Table Mountain, etc.

Most toe-curling of all was a visit to Robben Island, with a tour of the old jail led by a former prisoner. A solemn and serious occasion? Not, apparently, for Frean, who sat Mrs Teddy-Weddy in various poses (behind cell doors, behind bars, in the middle of the exercise-yard etc) – to the squirming embarrassment of fellow-hacks and horrified amazement of the tour guide.

ONE aspect of the George Galloway/Fake Sheikh debacle that went overlooked was the advice the MP claims he offered Mazher Mahmood when the *News of the World* reporter offered to donate cash to his Respect party.

"I told them that if they wanted to help 'the community' they should invest in the Islam Channel or start a radio station like the one I work for," Galloway claims.

That would be TalkSport, the station founded by ex-*Sun* editor Kelvin Mackenzie. Its recent efforts on behalf of the Islamic community have included presenter Charlie Wolf's description last December of peace activist Rachel Corrie, killed by an Israeli military bulldozer in the Gaza strip, as "scum" who "died of her own stupidity" – a comment watchdog Ofcom condemned as breaching "generally accepted standards".

BOSSES at the *Sun* are urging hacks to take part in a "confidential employee survey". But the hacks aren't exactly falling over themselves to tell management freely and candidly what they think of conditions at Wapping.

And no wonder. One unfortunate sub-editor who did just that during a similar exercise last autumn had her contract torn up on the spot by managing editor Graham Dudman for not showing enough "commitment", while a weeping colleague only just clung to her job after making a grovelling apology.

THE *News of the World* had a story a couple of weeks ago about how new Tory peer Lord James – the seriously eccentric David James who helped Michael Howard identify cuts in state spending – had a poltergeist at his West Country home and how the evil spirits had created mayhem and widespread fear in the James household.

But James was surprised and displeased when the *Screws* rang him to check the story. "I can't believe you know about this!" spluttered the new peer. "How on earth did you find out."

The *Screws* reporter, putting a ghostly ring to his voice, replied: "An unknown force put the information into our hands."

BANKING ON THE BARCLAYS

"Britain's £50 Billion a Year Addiction to Gambling" was the *Daily Telegraph*'s shock-horror front-page headline on 15 April. Describing the "huge potential social costs" of the UK's spreading casino culture, a Salvation Army spokesman warned: "Problem gambling can lead to a whole range of crises, including debt or bankruptcy, loss of employment and the breakdown of families."

So what is the *Telegraph* doing to combat this evil? Subscribers to the paper's online service will know the answer. In the last year they have been bombarded with special offers from "Ritz Casino Online", a spin-off from the hugely profitable Ritz Hotel casino, which is owned by the Barclay brothers – proprietors of the *Telegraph*.

Oddly enough, the Barclays have an interest in another personal-finance problem which the *Daily Telegraph* has been busily exposing. "Credit card companies are overcharging customers by more than £300 million a year," it reported a couple of weeks ago, noting that the Office of Fair Trading was threatening legal action against credit-card and store-card firms which impose swingeing penalty fees for failing to make a minimum payment or exceeding credit limits.

This followed the previous month's announcement from the Competition Commission – also reported by the *Telegraph* – that "store cards that charge the most exorbitant interest rates will have to warn customers that they can get cheaper credit elsewhere". New "wealth warnings" will appear on statements for customers who are being charged APRs above 25 percent

Although the *Telegraph* omitted to mention it, the victims of this crackdown may well include Sir David and Sir Frederick Barclay. In October 2002 they acquired the Littlewoods retail and mail order chain for £750m. The following year they spent a further £590m on Shop Direct, which includes the Great Universal, Kays and Innovations catalogues. Following a bewildering series of job cuts and reorganisations, they closed the Index chain and flogged off the Littlewoods stores to Primark. But enough customers remain on the mail order side to generate a £2bn turnover for the twins.

Littlewoods Home Shopping currently charges 29.9 percent APR. Naturally "administration charges" can also be applied for late payments and the like, but the Barclays add other, more esoteric fees to bump up their profits. These include: "Immediate credit reference file update: £5. Letter confirming clearance of debt: £10. Agreed reduction in payment schedule: up to £20. Fee for not providing a forwarding address: £30." And so on.

The OFT now says that any charge of more than £12 will be regarded as illegal unless there are "exceptional business factors". As the *Telegraph* reported: "It added that just because a charge fell below the £12 threshold did not make it legal and it expected a response from the industry by 31 May."

Even the Barclays' Littlewoods Visa card charges "a typical rate of 24.9 percent APR", plus payment protection. Some cardholders pay more and some less, but overall it costs more than virtually any other Visa card on the market. And of course there are those potentially "illegal" penalty charges which the OFT expects to hear about by the end of next month.

It will be fascinating to learn what the OFT makes of the fact that the Barclays' generally low-income retail customers are shouldering the burden of the seemingly endless pay-offs to redundant newspaper editors and executives which are such a feature of the twins' brilliant stewardship of the *Telegraph* group.

MURDOCH MOST FOUL

WHAT's the connection between Rupert Murdoch, Saddam Hussein's supposed lawyer and an ex-con who police say murdered crime reporter Veronica Guerin? And why is the *Sun* attacking Sky News and the *News of the Screws*?

News Corporation won't say, beyond carefully worded statements denying that Murdoch money went *directly* to notorious Irish gangster Patrick "Dutchy" Holland.

Holland was released from prison in Dublin two weeks ago after serving nine years of a 12-year sentence for drug dealing. He had originally planned to give an interview to Irish broadcaster RTE, but this was vetoed on grounds of taste by RTE's director-general following a campaign in the Irish *Daily Mail*.

Once RTE withdrew, the *Mail* turned its fire on Sky and the *Screws* which had stepped eagerly into the breach. Oddly enough the *Sun*'s Irish edition joined in the attack, a decision that must have been approved by London and is further evidence of bad blood between the Rebekah Wade and Andy Coulson camps.

Holland was then flown to Rome for his Sky interview, again professing his innocence of the Veronica Guerin murder. Guerin's brother Jimmy was unimpressed, complaining that "this deal was done without regard for the feelings of Veronica's family or the views of the majority of decent people. Sky has embarked on a new low in journalism."

Holland's preposterous "lawyer" Giovanni di Stefano, who also claims to act for Saddam Hussein (see *Eye* 1155), defended his client and his new friends at News International, threatening libel writs against detractors. But his confidence that "Dutchy" Holland could win defamation actions is hard to fathom. Although he denies killing Guerin, Holland's criminal record stretches back decades and includes a period of fighting alongside the IRA which culminated in a 1989 conviction for possessing firearms and explosives – a conviction he is now trying to overturn.

Whether di Stefano will be a help or a hindrance in this quest is also debatable. But he certainly enjoys the confidence of the *Screws* and Sky News – the latter of which seems to be heading in a long-feared Fox News direction, presumably at the Dirty Digger's instigation.

FREELANCE hack Andrew Brown was commissioned to write a profile of Kevin Underwood, the "cannibal killer" from Oklahoma, by the *Guardian*. He duly bashed out 900 words and sent them over to the paper by email.

Ping! His email was returned. The spam filters at the *Guardian* objected to its contents. Not the bit about how Underwood planned to dismember and barbecue his 10-year-old victim, or the references to his masturbatory habits: the paper objected to the title of one of Underwood's favourite books, *The Vagina Monologues*.

An alternative was urgently needed. But what synonym for the female pudenda is both instantly recognisable and fit for the filth filters? Got it: Brown simply replaced the word "Vagina" with the name of Canadian neocon and former Telegraph columnist Mark Steyn, assuming the sub-editors would appreciate the joke and make the substitution at their end.

The piece duly appeared on 19 April, revealing exclusively that the child-killer had been inspired by something called "The [Mark Steyn] Monologues", and leaving Brown feeling like a right c**t.

IN HIS telly review for the London *Evening Standard* last Friday, Victor Lewis-Smith laid into a new ITV series shown in London and the South-East, *Homes & Property*. But the piece never appeared.

Why the suppression? *Homes & Property* is the TV tie-in of a supplement of the same name which is given away weekly with… the *Evening Standard*.

THE arrest of headteacher and academy schools cheerleader Des Smith in the cash-for-coronets investigation isn't all that should be worrying supporters of the initiative.

Earlier this month it was announced that the programme will be run by the outfit largely responsible for the government's plans to rebuild or refurbish all schools in the next few years: Partnerships for Schools (PfS).

The organisation was set up with high hopes in April 2004 after the chancellor announced billions for the project in his budget, most of it inevitably in the form of "credits" to be spent on private finance initiative schemes.

The idea was that "local education partnerships" (LEPs) between private companies and local authorities would run groups of schools under PFI deals. But it's not quite working out that way: despite promises of £2.2bn worth of deals in 2005/06, the end of the financial year has passed without a single one being signed – mainly because of the convoluted and expensive process involved in setting up LEPs.

Nor are the programme's prospects likely to be helped by the "trust school" reforms in the current education bill, under which schools become more independent and probably less keen on running their finances collectively.

The man with the twin thankless tasks of rebuilding existing schools under PFI (increasingly unpopular everywhere except Whitehall), and delivering the academy initiative is PfS boss Richard Bowker, whose record on huge investment programmes when in charge of the Strategic Rail Authority was less than exemplary (see *Eye* 1140).

Now, if businessmen can't even be lured into sponsoring an academy by the prospect of donning the ermine, the chances of the hapless Bowker improving his record seem slim indeed.

WITH very little fanfare the Ministry of Defence has signed the biggest ever private finance initiative deal, Project Allenby-Connaught, for the 35-year, £8bn construction and servicing of the army's barracks in Aldershot and Salisbury plain.

The lucky winner of the contract was Aspire Defence Ltd, a consortium of Carillion, Kellogg Brown & Root and HSBC bank, the first two of whom also bagged the handy extra job, worth £5.7bn, of running the grounds, catering and various other services.

This bumper pay day represents quite an improvement on the deal announced nearly three years ago when Aspire became the "preferred bidder", at which stage it was reported to be worth £3.9bn. When the signing of the deal was announced earlier this month, however, the cost had multiplied – introducing the danger in such a complex contract that it is now inflated. Exactly this problem – where the price goes up without competition – has been criticised in the past by the National Audit Office (NAO), not least when the cost of the PFI deal to build the government communications headquarters (GCHQ) "increased by 21 percent, not wholly in a competitive environment". The lucky company then was… Carillion. With such huge amounts of public money at stake on the Aspire deal, the MoD responded, somewhat incomprehensibly, to a similar concern that "the £3.9bn figure quoted in 2003 was an internal estimate untested in competition, and was calculated using a different price base to the £8bn. Furthermore it related to a 30-year project whereas the £8bn covers a 35-year project." So that's all right then.

Allenby-Connaught won't be top dog in the PFI stakes for long, though. The MoD has two other whoppers in the pipeline – a £13bn deal for jet re-fuelling and a £19bn defence training scheme. The former is snarled up in negotiations with a preferred bidder consortium, while the latter has yet to reach that stage. If the latest signed deal is anything to go by, what the final costs will be are anybody's guess.

WHEN *Computer Weekly* magazine spotted that HM Revenue and Customs' £71m tax credits compensation deal with EDS included £24m payable only when the pisspoor IT company wins yet more government work, there were bound to be a few raised eyebrows.

In front of parliament's Treasury select committee last week, HMRC chairman David Varney was duly grilled on why he had cut a deal with the company that effectively encouraged the government to hand it more contracts. Varney resolutely stuck to the line that procurement rules would prevent any undue influence on Whitehall officials dishing out future IT work.

What Varney couldn't say, and what committee members wouldn't mention, is the sad truth that, with the government doling out billions of pounds worth of IT deals every year to just a handful of big players including EDS, the contracts the firm wins from the taxpayer will soon dwarf the mere £24m it owes HMRC anyway. If anyone should doubt that they need only look across Whitehall from the Revenue's HQ: the Ministry of Defence awarded EDS a £3bn deal *after* its shambolic tax credits performance had been exposed.

CALLED TO ORDURE

INSPECTOR Knacker insists that police questions take priority – but Westminster's own inquiries into party funding could prove just as tricky. The recent drubbing of Charlie Falconer shows that MPs may not prove nearly as tame as party managers hoped.

The Lord Chancellor is not wanted for questioning by Scotland Yard, so there was no way he could wriggle out an appointment with the constitutional affairs committee. Chaired by old Alan Beith, this is a group for whom the phrase "unknown plodders" might have been invented. Falconer could thus be excused the swagger with which he walked down the committee corridor. But The First Flatmate had a nasty surprise awaiting him. Beith & Co became the mice that roared.

Beith began by making a formal declaration of interest on behalf of everyone present. He pointed out that they were discussing the funding of political parties and, as senior members of those very parties, they should therefore admit on record that they could derive a financial benefit. Such honesty is most infra dig.

Falconer's patronising bluster was soon pricked further. A quietly furious Keith Vaz attacked Lord Sainsbury's appointment as a government minister, even though, or perhaps because, Labour owes him £2m. Vaz's admirable sally was doubly surprising. Not only has he himself been a schmoozer of rich men (remember the Hindujas?) but he also once served as Falconer's PPS.

The Lord Chancellor was still recovering from Vaz's "treachery" when the softly-spoken Alan Whitehead suggested that Falconer's appointment of arch-mandarin Sir Hayden Phillips to lead an inquiry into party funding was "a stitch-up". Around the horseshoe-shaped table other grey men now threw off their robes and started shouting "fix" and "inside job".

Tory brainbox Andrew Tyrie, normally ever so courteous, then leaned back to scoff at Falconer's claim that Labour was almost ready to present evidence to the inquiry. Few at Westminster believe this is true.

Cambridge academic David Howarth, a Lib Dem, was next to put the boot in with a brisk series of Sophoclean questions, and Falconer's stately triumph was soon turning into a rout. It was left to Alex Allan, the ex-Downing Street smoothie who is now permanent secretary at Falconer's Department of Constitutional Affairs, to try to come to the aid of his boss. He insisted that polls showed that "evidence of public attitudes is confused" – his way of saying "you lot and the public are equally ignorant". The MPs weren't impressed.

Falconer and Allan then joined forces to make the laughable claim that ministers "never" make big decisions about the awarding of government contracts. "Civil servants always take the decisions," purred Allan. "It's done by an objective process." It was therefore quite wrong to suggest that party donors could ever receive preferential treatment when it came to PFIs and the like.

Falconer shook his jowls in agreement, even though Allan's claim is at direct odds with decades of established Whitehall practice, and with the very principle of ministerial accountability. Some of the MPs expressed the view afterwards that Allan must have taken leave of his senses to make such an assertion.

The only comfort for Falconer was that his humiliation happened a couple of days before the row broke over Cherie Blair charging Labour £7,700 for hair-do's – a bill which, if state funding of politics goes any further, would end up being met by taxpayers. Maybe the committee should summon her slim-hipped tonsorialist, Monsieur Andre Suard, as its next witness.

'Gavel Basher'

Number crunching

4 ■ Kilometres of ice that have melted from the Scott-Turner Glacier in Norway

34,298

■ Kilogrammes of carbon dioxide produced by flying David Cameron and 10 advisers to go and look at it

HEALTH Secretary Patricia Hewitt faces a bumpy ride over her decision to award US firm DHL/Novation the contract to supply products to the NHS from the end of the year.

At present the not-for-profit NHS Logistics organisation is responsible for procuring supplies for the health service. It has won numerous national and international awards for supply chain excellence, and is so efficient that last year it returned £3m to NHS trusts as a rebate.

Nevertheless Hewitt is determined to press ahead with the new contract, despite question marks hanging over the way DHL/Novation conducts its business in America.

In the US about $20bn a year in medical products and services are sold under contracts arranged by DHL/Novation. The US Justice Department is currently conducting a criminal investigation of the medical supply industry to determine whether hospitals and medical care providers, including DHL/Novation, fraudulently overcharged federal and state health programmes for a wide array of goods – covering everything from rubber gloves to X-ray machines. Other allegations include the procurement of inferior products and that backhanders were paid to hospitals.

Because DHL/Novation is the link between thousands of health facilities on one side, and hundreds of medical goods and services companies on the other, the scope of the federal investigation is broad and after two years is far from complete.

All of which makes it puzzling that Hewitt is in such a hurry to get rid of NHS Logistics, which has a proven track record, and replace it with a company which has, to say the least, a heavy question mark over its future.

JUST FANCY THAT!

THE stakes are high in the by-election for the Moray seat at the Scottish parliament, as both leading candidates, the SNP's Richard Lochhead and Tory Mary Scanlon, had to resign their party list seats to fight for the more prestigious constituency seat left vacant by the death of Margaret Ewing MSP.

Scanlon has tried to present herself as the natural heir, writing to voters about her close friendship with Mrs Ewing: "I was proud to call her a friend. In me, you can choose someone who has the same compassion and determination…"

This is odd, since Mrs Ewing was a dedicated Scottish Nationalist and her former party colleagues say the pair were no more than "friendly acquaintances" who worked in the same parliament building but very often voted in opposite directions.

Scanlon's letter also omits any mention at all of her own Conservative party allegiance, leading opponents to accuse her of trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the electorate. It's certainly hardly a ringing endorsement of her own party.

"WE'VE prospered over the past 40 years only because we've been imbued with a spirit of public service," declares public sector contractor and leading beneficiary of government "outsourcing", Serco. Two recent episodes paint a different picture.

Last month parliament's public accounts committee (PAC) summoned, among others, the boss of Serco's home affairs division, Tom Riall, to explain his company's pisspoor performance on its contracts for the electronic tagging of offenders. Although required under its contract to report breaches of curfews within 24 hours, the company was failing to do so in a staggering 22 percent of cases, with 13 percent taking more than three days. One such failure led to the murder of a jeweller in Nottingham in 2003 (see *Eye* 1142).

There were signs, however, that under a new contract signed last April, performance was improving, prompting Labour MP Greg Clark to ask Riall: "What was in the old contract that clearly did not work?"

Riall had to admit: "We were not subject to performance deductions under the old contract for failures to report breaches on time." In other words, sod public service: we'll only perform if it will cost us a packet not to.

With such an attitude it was no surprise when, two weeks ago, chief prisons inspector Anne Owers found "squalid" conditions at Serco-run Doncaster prison on account of the company's "institutional meanness".

PS: This record was no hindrance to the appointment this month of Serco director Margaret Ford as a Labour peer. She is also chairwoman of English Partnerships. Her ennoblement is just reward for some expert brown-nosing when she was reappointed at EP last year, an occasion she took to thank Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott for his "clarity and support".

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

THE Hannah Research Institute, which has been studying every aspect of milk – from dairy farming to breast cancer – since 1928, is about to shut down for good. Despite being rated as delivering science of international quality, the Scottish Executive will cease to fund it this month.

The closure of this government-run research lab follows that of the world-respected Silsoe Research Institute, specialising in agri-engineering, last month. After 80 years, in which its scientists invented systems for every part of the food chain, from robotic milking and underwater fish health monitoring to decontaminating food packaging, Silsoe's funding body, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), decided to stop supporting it. As of last month only a quarter of the staff had found posts in science, risking the loss of their expertise for good.

Protest over the axing of four of the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology's (CEH) research sites attracted a little media coverage earlier this year, but there have also been severe cuts, including 40 jobs, at the Institute for Grassland and Environmental Research (IGER). The cuts follow the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) deciding to switch its research focus from sustainable farming to climate change and energy.

This shows a spectacular failure to connect cause and effect – exemplified by a speech made by Lord Bach in January about the need to cut methane gases. That same month the cuts at IGER got rid of the scientists working on agricultural methane emissions.

According to scientists' union Prospect, 660 posts in public science laboratories have been cut since 2000 and more are now under threat. In February Lord Sainsbury comforted the Commons science and technology select committee, telling MPs that expertise from closed government labs would pass into the university sector. But few universities can assemble such multi-disciplinary projects at a time when science departments are closing down.

FEEDOM OF INFORMATION

BARONESS ASHTON, one of "Cheeky" Charlie Falconer's underlings at the Department for Constitutional Affairs, told a select committee last week that the government might have to raise the fees for freedom of information requests because civil servants were having to deal with a large number of time-wasters.

"There is a genuine question to be answered. The issue of vexatious requests we have to be [aware of]," she said.

Baroness Ashton's remarks came in the same week that freedom of information campaigner Heather Brooke got an answer to an FoI request of her own – just how many "vexatious" requests are there, really?

Brooke had noticed that every time Falconer or one of his juniors spoke on the subject, they would always trot out the same four apparently silly examples: how much do government departments spend annually on toilet paper; how much do they spent on make-up; how many windows are there at the Department for Education and Skills; and "Does your minister exist?"

Brooke put in her request to Clare Moriarty, Constitution Director of the DCA, after hearing her come out with the same old list at the Association of Chief Police Officers conference in January – rounded off with the customary warning that fees might have to be increased to put a stop to such nuisances.

Brooke told the *Eye*: "We shouldn't be restricting access to such a powerful democratic tool based on just four questions the government think silly out of more than 40,000. And who knows – maybe it was a rival toilet roll company that had a legitimate reason to know how much taxpayers' money is spent on bog roll. People have a right to freely ask questions and get answers from their public servants."

Long after the 20-day limit for replies was up, Brooke has received her answer: "The information you requested is not held as the department does not formally record, list or categorise requests as 'irresponsible'." The letter went on to list – surprise! – the familiar four examples, plus two others: one about a woman wanting to know the number of uniformed bachelors in Hampshire police and another about the amount spent per department on vitamin supplements.

So, on the basis of a grand total of just six allegedly potty requests, the government is preparing to cripple the working of the FoI Act with higher fees. Just fancy that!

NUCLEAR NEWS

THE new Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) has just published its plans for the £56bn clean-up of the UK's 20 historic civil nuclear power facilities – but will there be enough engineers to get the job done?

The average age of the 11,000 engineers and skilled personnel currently working in the UK's nuclear industry is over 50, with many approaching retirement soon. Scientists' union Prospect has calculated that the industry will need 13,000 graduate entrants to join in the next 10 years if the NDA's plans are to be carried out.

On current trends that isn't very likely. Students do not see great career prospects in nuclear power – what with the perception, until recently, that the whole sector is heading for closure. In fact, regardless of decisions about the future of nuclear power, there are decades of work in decommissioning Sellafield alone.

So far the NDA has put a meagre £5m over three years towards "Nucleus", part of the proposed National Nuclear Skills Academy in West Cumbria, in partnership with Lakes College and the University of Central Lancashire, offering a two-year "Foundation Degree" in nuclear decommissioning (entry requirement: one A level at grade D or equivalent). This was followed by much patting of itself on the back for providing "generations to follow with the right mix of skills", but will produce a tiny fraction of the number of workers needed.

"Of course I don't need a fork."

ITV

The Queen at 80 (BBC1)

The Girl Who Would be Queen (ITV1)

Ten Days That Made The Queen (Channel 4)

THE media generally mocked the fact that members of the cabinet had stumped up thirty quid each for an official birthday present for the Queen, the implication being that there was something a bit banana republic about the obligation.

Yet Britain's main broadcasters all felt obliged to shell out many hundreds of thousands of quid to fund birthday portraits of their own, to be shown close to the day. Of course none of these was officially official and, in theory, the producers were free to say what they wanted. In practice, of course, they weren't.

Until roughly the late 80s – when Frosty and Sir Alistair Burnet would actually ask Charles and the Queen Mother in interviews, "is there anything else you'd like to say?", the royals could rely on a simple tradition of deference in broadcasting. Subsequently, there was a wobble between crown and box over the Di and Charles adultery interviews but the Queen has now found a new way to demand respect: film permissions.

Angered by the Di *Panorama*, Buck House broke the long tradition that the BBC filmed the Christmas Day broadcast and shared it out with ITV. With the birthday films, the monarchy had a double hold over the programme-makers. The royal family had let it be known that a large stock of private cine film, stretching back to the childhood of Princess Elizabeth, was available for use. The monarch also personally controls access to footage of the coronation, which any passably thorough producer was going to need to use.

The trick worked perfectly. At a time when TV was theoretically freer than ever before to treat the Queen's life with some journalistic distance, Elizabeth II's clever archive-bribery did them up like a kipper, ensuring shows even more sycophantically adoring than those at the time of the Golden Jubilee.

BBC1 started the celebrations with **The Queen at 80**, opening with writer-narrator Andrew Marr's giveaway promise up front of "previously unseen home movies of the royal family". Marr's commentary was a clever enterprise because it sounded cooler and more editorialising than the usual palace-creeping whisper.

Until, that is, you stopped to listen to what he was saying. The film's line was the sheer tedium of much of what we ask this octogenerian to do: meeting vintage car bores, chatting to Canadian legislators. But, in reality, this is just another version of the fawning "impeccable sense of duty" line which is traditional in these programmes and when Marr started up with "and she's 80 as well!", one was left to reflect that his patronising sycophancy isn't much better than the old cringing sycophancy of Burnet and Frost.

And, when ITV showed **The Girl Who Would Be Queen**, it became clear that the BBC hadn't even got much in return for Marr's down-payment on his knighthood. Proving that the wounds from the Di *Panorama* are still deep, the palace had given ITV all of the George VI cine films, rather than the few frames available to the BBC.

This stuff – including princesses Elizabeth and Margaret fooling around as kids and backstage footage of the coronation – was genuinely revelatory for monarchists and historians. Regrettably, the production was so overcome with a need to justify the monarch's largesse that presenter Mary Nightingale adopted a level of gush which made Richard Dimbleby look like a Republican.

"But the age of innocence had come to an end!" she crooned, introducing the abdication crisis. Previewing World War II, she gasped: "But the blackness of war lay just over the horizon!" Occasional attempts at modernity were even more bathetic. Because the Queen's dad died while she was in Kenya, the soundtrack music from *The Constant Gardener* was laid over footage of her flight home.

And, throwing to a commercial break which would be followed by "intimate family footage" of Princess Elizabeth doing ballet, Nightingale promised: "And still to come – the dancing Queen!" Thankfully, later footage of the monarch choosing clothes from a wardrobe was not tagged "the closet Queen!"

James Runcie, director of Channel 4's **Ten Days That Made The Queen,** had unwisely suggested in pre-publicity that his show would be the antidote to the "God bless you, Ma'am!" approach required of BBC1 and ITV by tradition and regulation. The prospect of an ex-archbishop's son putting the boot in to the lady who ran his dad's church got some of the papers in a right old lather.

As it turned out, the first glimpse of the "previously unseen footage" from the royal collection alerted us that the palace had done its work here as well. The conceit of the film – focusing on 10 days in the Queen's life – hinted at analysis and even criticism, as one of the days was the death of Diana.

But the opening run of key dates – the abdication, the news of the King's death coming to Kenya, the coronation – are so familiar both from history and the birthday shows on other channels that Runcie's film was soon established in the usual sonorous rhythm: duty, forebearance, impeccable etc.

Even the Diana section was a squib. At the time, the Queen's failure to wail and beat her breast in Trafalgar Square felt like the critical misjudgement for which republicans had always waited. But, nine years on, it's the bawling strangers in the Mall and the half-wits baying at the palace gates who look to have got the mood wrong and the monarch's Germanic repression, though not exactly vindicated, now seems historically irrelevant.

In recent years, it has become standard to argue that it was a mistake for the royals to admit television cameras to their lives. But this week's films made clear that George VI's decision to get a cine camera turns out to have shored up broadcasting support for his daughter.

'Remote Controller'

DEAL OR ? NO DEAL
IT TAKES GREAT SKILL...
WHO SAYS THIS SHOW REQUIRES NO TALENT?...
TO SIT THROUGH 45 MINUTES OF NOEL EDMONDS WITHOUT PUTTING YOUR FOOT THROUGH THE SCREEN!
"Beat the *anker!"
Ken Pyne

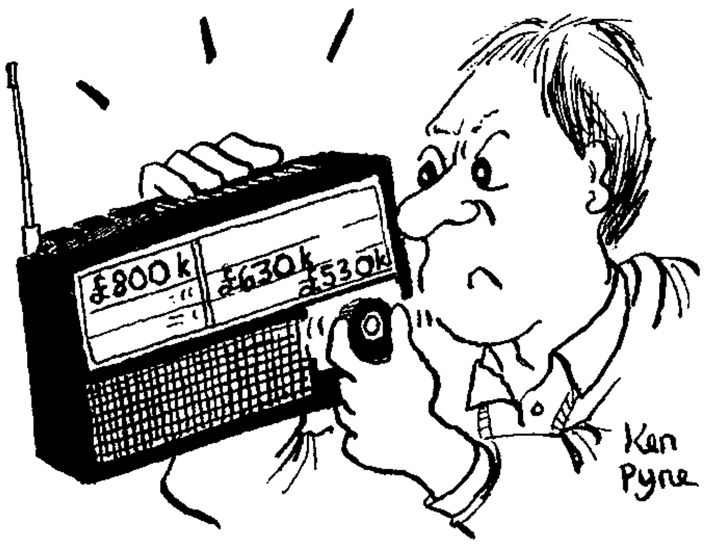
MEDIA NEWS

NOT content with their tear-stained prime-time "Farewell" to Mike Baldwin (see Remote Controller, last issue), ITV extended the mourning period yet further with last Saturday's *An Audience With Coronation Street*, an all-singing, all-dancing spectacular featuring current and former cast members.

It climaxed with a special "tribute" to the late knicker-factory owner, complete with an appearance by the still very much alive actor who played him, Johnny Briggs.

The show was recorded a few days after the real-life death of actress Lynne Perrie, who spent 15 years on *Coronation Street* playing Ivy Tilsley before being controversially sacked in 1994 (her character was killed off, off-screen, a year later). She was not mentioned.

BBC Radio



WHEN did history begin at the BBC World Service? Quite recently, it would appear. The Bush House publicity machine seems determined to promote the fiction that nothing much happened before the appointment of Nigel Chapman as director of World Service and Richard Sambrook was moved there as director of BBC Global News, post-Hutton.

When Chapman announced the launch of an Arabic Television service next year, his staff were astonished to have it presented not as a revival but as an entirely new venture on the part of World Service. Later, an extended *Independent* interview with Sambrook, stated: "In the first quarter of next year it [Arabic TV] will become the BBC's first foreign language television service."

The Sambrook-Chapman team seem to be ignoring the fact that there was a previous high profile, though ultimately unsuccessful, BBC Arabic Television service that ran from 1994-96. They ignore the Japanese Service that has been running since 1994, and the Chinese and Hindi television services that had brief lives in the 1990s.

HOW did BBC Radio 4 mark the Saint's day of England, which fell on a Sunday for the first time in many years?

With a rousing display of patriotism, perhaps, defiantly reclaiming the flag of St George from the racists and football hooligans? Not quite. *Sunday Worship* on 23 April came from the east coast of Scotland, where the Rev Dr Ian Bradley used his service to "celebrate all of the United Kingdom's four patron saints and explore the distinctive but overlapping spiritual identities that make up Britishness." This culminated in a request for "a patron saint for the United Kingdom as a whole".

Curiously the programme had no problem with commemorating St Patrick with a service from Downpatrick on 19 March, St Andrew in a service held in Aberdeen on 28 November 2004, or St David in one from Newport on 29 February the same year.

3.20 HAVE I BEEN HERE BEFORE? With Sarah Greene. (rpt.)

Daily Mail

THE BBC Monitoring bureau in Tashkent is under threat – not from the Uzbeks who would like to remove all foreign media organisations from the country, but from a BBC manager based in the UK.

Peter Robinson, the suit responsible for the region, has threatened to close the unit if the BBC loses a court case for unfair dismissal brought by a former employee.

The Uzbek butchers of Tashkent are delighted that an internal staff dispute may yet rid them of irritating interference from overseas.

ANNOUNCING a new series of prime-time, 9pm current affairs "specials" on BBC1 back in February, the BBC's news director Helen Boaden promised that the new programmes would not be "Trevor-lite type topics" or "particularly tabloid".

Just as well. Last week's spectacularly Trevor McDonald-ish *Real Story Special*, "The McCartneys Versus the Fur Trade", a celeb-heavy hour featuring not just the ex-Beatle and his monopode spouse but Jennifer Lopez, Beyoncé and what the BBC called "a star-studded Peta gala", gathered just 1.8 million viewers. With an 8 percent share of the audience, this was significantly less than tuned in to the football on subscription channel Sky Sports One. Don't expect to see Posh Spice presenting *Panorama* any time soon...

JOINED-UP BBC

March 2006: BBC1's *Watchdog* team investigates collapse of "educational motivator" Yolande Beckles' business with debts of £125,000

March 2006: BBC2's Documentaries and Contemporary Factual team puts finishing touches to three-part series, *Don't Mess With Miss Beckles*, presented by Yolande Beckles.

Grumpy Old Cavemen

5th over: The crowd are staying fairly quiet at Jamshedpur and the unpleasant heat could be to blame as there is so little shade on the concrete terracing. Ominously a black crowd looms in the distance – and thunderstorms have been forecast – but conditions stay sunny for now.

India v. England, BBC Sport

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: In Alexander Pope's poem, what "springs eternal in the human breast"?

Contestant: Milk.

The Big Quiz, LBC 97.3

Gary King: What's the main ingredient of a Molotov cocktail?

Contestant: Vodka?

Gary King: What British mammal lives in a sett and has a distinctive black-and-white striped head?

Contestant: A zebra.

Gary King: Which singing diva had a UK number one hit in the 1960s called Respect?

Contestant: George Galloway.

AD NAUSEAM

READERS of this column will be well aware of how much plagiarism goes on in adland.

Creatives get handsomely paid to either copy each other (*Eye* 1151) or pass off ideas skimmed from the cultural mainstream as their own, as with VW's Gillian Wearing bite, Honda's "Cog", or French Connection's recent lesbian karate campaign (*Eyes passim*). Whenever agencies are challenged about making money from knock-off ideas, they will talk of a long history of inspiration ping-ponging between all media. Roughly translated, this means: "We're all at it but no one's ever managed to prove it."

Take, for example, Rainey Kelly Campbell Roalfe Y&R's latest campaign for Virgin Credit Cards. First broadcast late last year, the TV ads followed the fortunes of a fictional everyman named Nick Jones. The campaign borrowed not only its plot but most of its wording from a book published in July called *Yes Man* by Danny Wallace. In the book, Danny Wallace leads a dull life until he has an epiphany, and decides to say yes to everything. In the ad, Nick Jones leads a dull life until he has an epiphany, and decides to say yes to everything… including Virgin's card. RKCR's creative epiphany had been to change the name Danny to Nick.

RKCR might have got away with it, except that in the time in which its ad was going through sign-off and production, Wallace's book had become a bestseller and the film rights had been sold to Warner Bros. With rapacious American lawyers on his side, Wallace was less inclined to sign the form he was offered by Rainey Kelly to disown his original idea and get back in his hole.

Instead, Wallace asked Rainey Kelly to pay £2,000 to Crisis. Remarkably, the agency agreed – an admittance of guilt that, nonetheless, let Rainey Kelly off the hook rather lightly given that its 2005 billings were £209m. Moreover, at the time of writing, Crisis says it can find no record of the £2,000; RKCR says it has paid it.

When the *Eye* contacted the agency, it denied the ads had been stolen, said it did not expect to be sued by Warner Bros and added that the creatives responsible had not been reprimanded, as "we don't do that sort of thing." The agency seemed surprised that copying an ad was a story at all. And yet when Danny Wallace contacted RKCR initially, saying that due to the number of people asking him if he was promoting Virgin Credit Cards he was considering issuing a statement distancing himself, RKCR's head of legal affairs, Alex Hannam, bit back like a wounded dog. He said that RKCR would take such a step "very seriously", and that "in the event that any such public announcements are made, Virgin Money may have claims for defamation or malicious falsehood." In other words, when an ad agency is accused of plagiarism it invokes threats of legal action. But when the same ad agency is later forced to admit that it did in fact copy an idea wholesale, it can't see what all the fuss is about.

PS: Meanwhile the ads have begun a second burst.

FOOTBALL FOCUS

ANTI-semitism is a form of abuse against the Jewish community," announces the front page of the Let's Kick Racism Out of Football campaign's website (www.kickitout.org). "Kick It Out works with the game to challenge all forms of racial discrimination and exclusion."

This admirable statement is illustrated with a large photograph of West Ham midfielder Yossie Benayoun, who is Jewish. His team recently spent a few days in Dubai, a "nice gesture by the club", in the words of assistant manager Peter Grant, which gave players a chance "to get away, have a bit of sun on their backs and spend some time together relaxing."

Except for Benayoun and his team mate Yaniv Katan, that is, who as Israeli citizens are banned from entering the United Arab Emirates. Despite this, the club decided to press ahead with the visit, which had apparently been "planned in principle from very early in the season", and sent the Jews to Spain instead.

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Green is new blue for Tories." – George Pascoe-Watson, *Sun*.

"Blue is, apparently, the new green." – Tim Hames, *Times*.

"So now green is the new blue – and also the new red." – Andrew Rawnsley, *Observer*.

"Green is the new black." – Graydon Carter, *Vanity Fair*.

"Pink is the new black." – *Birmingham Post*.

"Ideas are the new black." – *Guardian*.

"Naked is DEFINITELY the new black." – *Sun*.

"Brainy is the new black." – *Daily Telegraph*.

"Posh is the new black and the country estate the new housing estate." – *Grauniad*.

"Trampolines are the new Leylandii." – BBC News 24.

POP-EYE

THE sight and sound of Sir Cliff Richard pleading for an extension in the 50-year copyright period in sound recordings is an unedifying one. Mainly because it represents a phenomenally successful and rich artist arguing for a law that will benefit him, the complacent record companies and a few other equally successful performers at the expense of less-fortunate acts.

Under most record contracts, the record company owns a recording outright for 50 years and the artist gets no say on whether it's available or not. If they try to license it for release on their own label, the record company will charge a sizeable, possibly prohibitive fee for the privilege. Under the status quo, that artist could reclaim and reissue their own music after 50 years.

Meanwhile, many small record labels have sprung up to reissue historic recordings more than 50 years old, most of which would make a profit too small to register on the majors' radars. Extending the copyright period would actually deprive some ageing artists of a welcome pension, put a lot of small labels out of business and reduce considerably the amount of music available.

Most puzzling is the fact that the industry seems to have only just realised that the 50-year copyright period exists, when they've had since the 1911 Copyright Act to lobby for a change. It's only become an issue now that the back catalogues of a small handful of iconic, ultra-successful artists such as Elvis Presley, the Beatles, Bob Dylan and Sir Cliff are set to pass into the public domain. Extending the copyright period would mean that record companies have no incentive to discover new talent. When Cliff Richard signed to EMI in 1958, the company wasn't relying on the smash hits of 1908 to fund the deal.

In the unfortunate event that the record companies and Sir Cliff get their wishes, it should be at a heavy price. The majors should make their entire archives commercially available, now that the technology exists. If a recording is allowed to fall out of catalogue, rights should revert to the artist, as with books. Better still, leave well alone. Anything else would be an endorsement for restrictive practices.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE European Commission's LIFE programme spends millions of European taxpayers' euros every year on laudable causes such as conserving eagles in Hungary and protecting forests in Scotland.

But it also has a less obviously green side: doling out large grants to some of Europe's biggest and most polluting companies in a vain attempt to persuade them to clean up their acts a bit.

Airbus, for example, came to the commission in 2004, rolled out some of Brussels' favourite buzzwords ("innovative", "integrated", "taking a life-cycle approach", etc), and was promptly given £1.6m to put in place an "environmental management system". The company claimed this would "effectively support the forecast growth of various industrial sectors in the air transport industry", whilst helping the company achieve ISO 14001 status in all of its plants across Europe by the end of 2006. In other words, it would help Airbus make bigger profits.

Quite why taxpayers should pay to boost Airbus's bottom line, while lending it a green tinge that will no doubt be seized on by its PR company, was not covered in the project proposal. Normally the EU has a "polluter pays" principle, which is even written down in a treaty. But Airbus, with a bumper turnover of £15.3bn in 2005, has friends in high places. Why should the polluter pay when the taxpayer can do so instead?

BAE Systems, meanwhile, currently negotiating to sell its share in Airbus, will be pleased with the way things have turned out. Its 20 percent share of the company will only have become more valuable thanks to the handout from the EU's environmental budget and subsequent ISO certification and new systems for recycling paperclips and turning the lights out when no one is in the room.

VOTERS in the West Midlands were glowing with pride when MEP Neena Gill leapt to the defence of the 2,300 workers facing the sack at Peugeot's Coventry factory.

Just hours after the announcement, she observed: "If the plant does close, it will present the West Midlands with a real challenge… But I'd like to remind the people affected of the words of Charles Swindoll: 'We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations and Life is 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you react to it.'"

If the voters decide to boot Ms Gill from office at the next election, it will give her an excellent opportunity to put Swindoll's theory into practice.

EU-phemisms

We check it's okay with the French farmers

DOING THE ROUNDS

AS a GP, M.D. earns £40 an hour. To take home £250,000 a year, as the BBC are suggesting, I'd need to clock up 120 hours a week. I used to do this as a junior doctor, but I was knackered and dangerous. Any GP still putting in those sort of hours is welcome to the money, although he (and it probably is a he) is also likely to be knackered and dangerous.

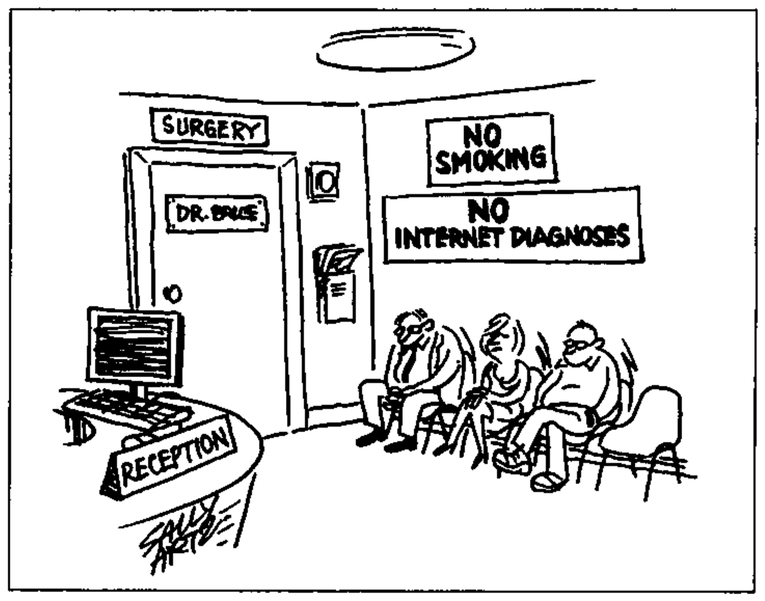
This furore over GPs' pay is a convenient smokescreen for New Labour's failure to radically improve the NHS. The current debts are not because the reforms are "biting", but rather because they haven't happened. Getting access to, or time with, the GP you choose is harder than it ever was. And consultations are now driven by targets, not patients.

When I qualified in 1990, I had 10-minute appointments. Today, I still have 10-minute appointments. The patients are equally complicated but more likely to demand and complain (unsurprisingly, given the money going into the NHS). Doctors need time to diagnose and treat safely; patients need it to express themselves; but neither gets it. So where's the reform?

As Professor Aidan Halligan, the director of clinical governance for the NHS in England and former deputy Chief Medical Officer put it: "We have learnt that throwing money at the problem only allows us to do more of what we have always done. Any suggestion of real reform has been a deceit… Targets have become an end rather than a means and, together with blinkered performance management, have distorted health care priorities... At a moment of unprecedented need, healthcare is suffering a leadership void which has caused it to lose its way."

M.D. has long argued that centrally imposed reforms can never work, not least because the vast majority of the NHS workforce doesn't feel motivated or inspired by the medium or the message of any political party. The one change of Labour's that could make a difference, "Healthcare Outside Hospitals", has arrived too late to save Patricia Hewitt's career or Blair's legacy.

Although GPs, and the drug industry, are earning more for lumbering patients with 20 tablets a day that they can't possibly remember to take, the vast majority of NHS funding still goes into



hospitals. The Tories allowed some GPs to develop better community services (and higher wages) through fund-holding, but it was an iniquitous system that penalised patients of non-fundholders. However, the ethos, of providing cheaper, better care for patients outside hospitals, was correct.

Alas, Labour, having preached the evils of fund-holding in opposition, could not draw on its strengths and extend it to all. So it was abolished. Now, nine years later, fund-holding has been resurrected as Practice-Based Commissioning, but now all the new money has been gobbled up (largely by hospitals) and the NHS is rife with debt, panic and job insecurity. In such a climate, it can only fail.

If "Healthcare Outside Hospitals" had accompanied the influx of money, superb community services could have been developed that would have led to the logical closure of unneeded hospitals and the centralisation of better specialist services on fewer sites. However, closing hospitals now, in a time of financial crisis, looks like panic.

For nine years, Blair's main focus has been on waiting times for hospital treatment, *which* were 18 months when he took over and he hopes will be 18 weeks when he leaves. This would be an undoubted improvement, at huge cost, but given that more than 90 percent of healthcare has nothing to do with hospitals, it hardly represents system reform. Instead, we've had nine years lurching between contradictory initiatives and, surprise, surprise, we've hardly moved at all. Time to blame those greedy GPs.

M.D.

AIR RAGE

Spreading routes

CHANCELLOR Gordon Brown's green credentials – if he ever really had any – are undermined by a shift in his party's aviation policy, with taxpayers' money now being used to start even more air routes.

"Environmental sustainability is not an option, it is a necessity," Brown told the UN last week, calling for greater international cooperation on climate change. Meanwhile, behind the scenes in Britain, regions are being played off against each other to *increase* flights – and so cause even more environmental damage.

European rules prohibit subsidising air routes except where flights are socially important but carry too few passengers to make profits (such as to remote Scottish islands). The air industry has found a way round the rules, however, and New Labour (with Lib Dem help in Scotland) has happily created "route development funds" (RDFs) to channel millions of pounds of subsidy into an industry that already enjoys the massive perk of tax-free fuel.

RDF cash is meant for valuable new routes that wouldn't be viable without subsidy. But two of the three subsidised new routes from Glasgow airport are to destinations already served by flights from nearby Edinburgh airport; and this month Wales gets in on the act with subsidised Cardiff-Brussels flights – duplicating flights to Brussels from nearby Bristol. Scotland is funding Aberdeen-Bristol flights, supposedly impossible without subsidy, but this month the airline receiving that cash will also start flying Aberdeen-Cardiff.

Subsidised routes are also supposed to provide net economic benefit, including inbound tourism, to the region providing the money. But Glasgow's all-year subsidised flights, to the booming tourist destinations of Dubai, Prague and Barcelona, seem designed to take even more Brits abroad for their holidays and stag parties.

The system feeds on the parochialism of local politicians, who fear economic isolation and decline unless their airport has flights to the same range of destinations as rival airports. Andrew Davies, the Welsh Transport Minister, reckons the Cardiff-Brussels route "sends an important signal about our place in Europe". AviaSolutions, a consultancy which has done very nicely thank you out of implementing RDFs, is helping to spread the message, hoping other countries will follow suit: "Route development funds have proved extremely successful in encouraging specific routes, which are critical for regional economic development."

Bristol airport has called for a Southwest RDF to help it compete with the £4m of public cash soon to be pumped into new flights at Cardiff. The Northwest, home to Britain's busiest airport outside the Southeast, is also creating an RDF and the Northeast plans one too. That's all in line with New Labour's wishes in its 2003 white paper on aviation.

Thus RDFs are helping a small nation like Britain to create phenomenally intensive flights – a textbook example of unsustainable development. But if the rest of the world copied that intensity, the effect on global warming would be catastrophic. While Gordon Brown lectures the rest of the world on co-operation against global warming, his party's policy at home is that local and national self-interest justify yet more air routes, bigger terminals and more runways to ensure aviation emissions go on growing.

'Fokker'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

BUMS IN SEATS

IN THE last *Eye*'s story about Sunderland city councillor David Allan's little difficulty concerning the subscriptions of local Amicus members – union members pay him, as branch secretary, in cash but the money mysteriously does not reach Amicus's bank account – we promised "more Sunderland Labour deadbeats next issue".

Where to begin?

Perhaps with former councillor and notorious drunkard Kevin O'Connor. As *Eye* 1146 reported, he has convictions for drink-driving and breaching the Data Protection Act (he read out personal information about a "problem" tenant, taken from council files, at a public meeting). The Labour party, however, believes he is a suitable person to sit on the city council and has selected him to be a candidate on 4 May.

Protests by local party members saw Cllr Tommy Wright removed from the list of candidates last November after a large amount of hard porn was discovered on his council-issue laptop (*Eye* 1146), but he has since quietly been reinstated.

Allan may be a thief, O'Connor may be a drunk and Wright may be a perv, but at least they have never actually killed anyone. Their colleague, Cllr Paul Watson, was tipped off in 1993 that the social club he owns was going to be burgled. Instead of telling the police, Watson and two mates lay in wait for the thieves. After a violent struggle at 2 am petty crook David Talbot, 33, who had come with two accomplices to raid Watson's slot machines, ended up dead, with a knife in his heart. Watson and two other men were charged with murder, but their trial in February 1995 was halted by the judge on the second day after the two key prosecution witnesses, Talbot's fellow burglars, changed their stories.

"Stabber" Watson, as he is affectionately known in Sunderland, could well become the next leader of the city council, if current leader Bob Symonds is defeated on 4 May by Independent candidate Stephen Hanratty. Hanratty, a train driver and JP, a man of unquestioned good character, was until recently a Labour party member but quit in disgust after Wright and O'Connor were selected as candidates in preference to him. His campaign is being run by former Labour councillor Mike Tansey, currently the council's only Independent, who left Labour after he was disciplined for speaking in favour of councils holding on to their housing stock, rather than flogging it off to housing associations such as the Sunderland Housing Group (*Eyes passim*), the "registered social landlord" which now owns Sunderland's 36,000 former council houses.

● EARLIER this month Tansey and other prominent critics of the Sunderland regime received an absurd "strictly confidential" letter from London law firm Olswangs sent on behalf of Peter Walls, boss of the Sunderland Housing Group (SHG). Walls is desperate to close down Dadsplace, the well-informed website which chronicles the corruption and nepotism that are rife in the north-east's biggest city (www.dadsplace.co.uk). Olswang's idiotic letter asks recipients to confirm whether they are involved in Dadsplace – so they can be sued for libel if they are! The recipients of the letters have in turn gone to the *Eye*'s favourite law firm, Peter Carter-Fuck and partners, who are now threatening to counter-sue Walls on a no-win-no-fee basis.

Last year Walls wasted £70,000 of tenants' cash by employing Newcastle law firm Dickinson Dees in his fruitless vendetta against Dadsplace. With rapacious London law firms such as Olswangs and Carter-Fuck involved, this year's bill could be even higher.

RENAISSANCE MAN

PREVIOUS *Eye*s have reported how private PR consultancy Renaissance, set up in 1997 by Tower Hamlets Council's former PR chief Tony Regan, has been raking in the money at Britain's most deprived borough. Just how much has been revealed following a freedom of information request by Jean Geldart, an officer of the public sector employees' union, Unison.

Between 2000 and 2006 Tower Hamlets paid just over £1m to Renaissance. Sara Williams, the council's assistant chief executive, gave figures to Geldart which showed that £421,230.27 was paid out in the years 2000 to 2003, although council documents seen by the *Eye* indicate that the figure was nearly twice that – £765,102.00. Additionally, Renaissance offshoot Verve is being paid £250,000 for a 15-month contract to run the council's communications office, plus the salaries of up to five Verve staff who have been doing the work of unfilled vacancies.

As *Eye* 1146 reported, one of the first "services" provided by Verve MD Lorraine Langham was to engineer the dismissal of Eileen Short, a press officer with 14 years service at the council. Ms Short's face no longer fitted because she had campaigned in her spare time against the council's unpopular attempts to flog off its housing stock.

CON-SULTANCY CORNER

VARIOUS firms of consultants also appear to have been the only beneficiaries of Bradford city council's whiffy attempt to flog off its buildings to property giant Carillion (*Eye* 1138).

BNP Council Election leaflet, Wetherby Ward, Leeds

The £1.2bn deal collapsed last year after allegations of impropriety were made against the council's "director of asset management" Linda Carmichael. An anonymous informant alleged that information had been withheld from council members and other bidders so as to favour Carillion. Ms Carmichael was suspended from her job and remains on "sick leave".

Last month the district auditor, Ivan McConnell, concluded a public interest report into the affair. While he made no observations on individuals, he concluded that the council failed to document the project properly, records were incomplete, there were conflicts of interest and a failure to predict the fees that were paid out to financial consultants.

Between July 2003 and June 2005 consultants were paid more than £550,000 for financial advice that should have cost a fraction of that. The DA concluded: "Officers failed to make certain that there were written agreements in place between the council and its financial advisers". Word of mouth, in other words, and therefore no paper trail.

When Lib-Dem councillor David Ward tried to ask questions at a council meeting about the role in the debacle played by Bradford's former chief executive, Philip Robinson, he was told by legal director Gerry Danby to shut up as the authority had "come to an agreement" with Robinson. This meant Robinson had been allowed to leave with a handy £115,000 payoff and no awkward questions asked four months earlier.

SCARY FOR GEHRY

POOR OLD Frank Gehry. It looks more and more unlikely that he will ever see his ghastly glass skyscrapers built on the seafront in Hove. The world's trendiest architect is up against a trio of the high court, the Inland Revenue – and, even more formidable, a bowls club.

In two months' time the chief executive of Skidrow-on-Sea council, Alan McCarthy, will appear in court to answer charges that he has flouted the local plan in allowing Gehry's plans for tower blocks on the King Alfred site. The case has been brought by a concerned resident, Nigel Furness.

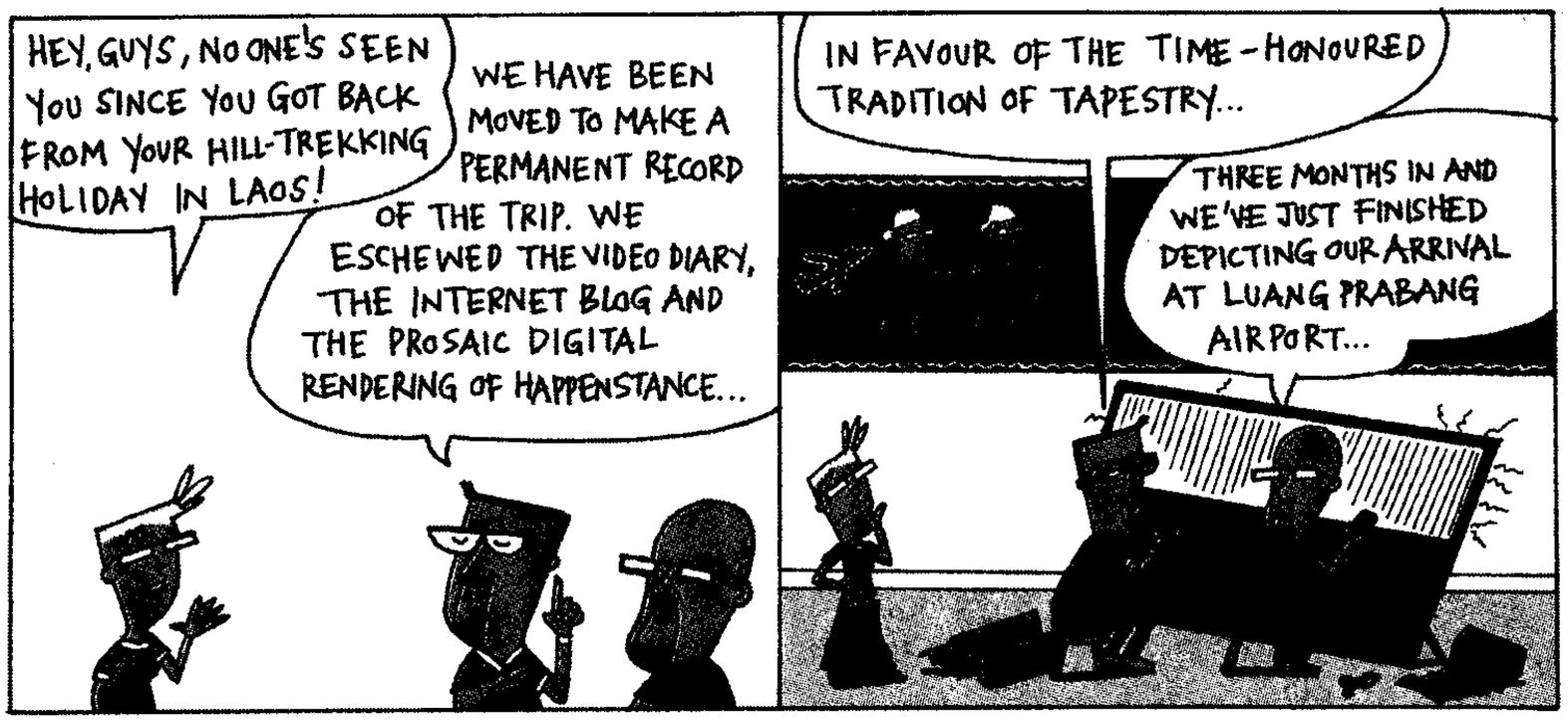
Meanwhile, the district valuer – a scion of the Inland Revenue – has produced a report which strongly suggests that the "tin-can towers" scheme is unviable. Skidrow council would be left with egg on its face. "The developer currently shows a profit on development costs of about 10 percent, which would not be viable given the fairly high risk nature of this development," says the valuer.

The valuer says the scheme's flats would have to be highly priced to try to make the figures balance – yet the scheme was originally sold on the promise that it would contain a high proportion of "affordable" housing.

Developer Karis's backers, the Dutch bank ING, also face an angry bowls club. With no room at the proposed development for the long-established Hove club, which occupies part of the site, it was promised a site elsewhere. The valuer, however, points out that the £2m to finance this will only be forthcoming if there is a profit. And that is a big maybe. When the bowls-playing matrons of Hove get angry it is not a pretty sight – and certainly one to give a mere architect, however cutting-edge, pause for thought.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER


HEY, GUYS, NO ONE'S SEEN YOU SINCE YOU GOT BACK FROM YOUR HILL-TREKKING HOLIDAY IN LAOS!
WE HAVE BEEN MOVED TO MAKE A PERMANENT RECORD OF THE TRIP. WE ESCHEWED THE VIDEO DIARY, THE INTERNET BLOG AND THE PROSAIC DIGITAL RENDERING OF HAPPENSTANCE...
IN FAVOUR OF THE TIME-HONOURED TRADITION OF TAPESTRY...
THREE MONTHS IN AND WE'VE JUST FINISHED DEPICTING OUR ARRIVAL AT LUANG PRABANG AIRPORT...

NOOKS and CORNERS

WELL, they didn't waste any time. The Architect's House next to the British Consulate in Istanbul, the threat to which I mentioned in *Eye* 1155, is no more.

It had emerged that the Foreign Office, having failed to dispose of St Helena's Chapel, built by Lord Dufferin – owing to the opposition of the Anglican Church Council, the British community in Istanbul and MPs and others here in Britain – was now minded to sell the site of this former gatehouse to Pera House to the new hotel next door with whom it was in cahoots. The dirty deed was then done on 3 April. A tall metal screen was erected around the Architect's House and, hey presto, it was rapidly demolished by the developer of the adjacent hotel.

The Istanbul Consulate

The scandal is not just that a shabby commercial deal has been done with land originally granted by the Sublime Porte to Her Majesty's government to assist our diplomatic presence in the old capital of the Ottoman Empire. It is also that a fine and useful historic building has been destroyed – without consultation with the Turkish authorities.

The heritage department of the FO raised no objection to the demolition, even though it now emerges that this red-brick building dated from the 1760s and was the gatehouse to the old timber Pera House which housed successive ambassadors until it was destroyed in 1831 in one of several fires that devastated this part of Istanbul. The estates directorate also announced that it was not possible to put the building to any public use since it was seismically unsound – even though it had stood for more than two centuries and was in good condition until 2005 when it temporarily housed the consulate's commercial section.

This vandalism is in tune with New Labour's general distaste for historic buildings, and it is clear the Foreign Office now regards the prime purpose of our diplomatic representatives as furthering Britain's commercial interests. This is a shame, for some of our embassies abroad – like that in Paris – are magnificent buildings which surely maintain Britain's prestige more effectively than some fortified, bomb-proof masterpiece by Milord Foster or Rogers with which the FO would like to replace them.

As for the consulate in Istanbul, this was originally built as our embassy by Sir Stratford Canning in the 1840s when Britain was trying to influence the policies of the Ottoman Empire. It was conceived as a grand and impressive palace and was designed by W.J. Smith but with the great Charles Barry – architect of the Reform Club and the Palace of Westminster – as consultant. It was damaged in another fire, in 1870, but restored. It was this fine palazzo which was damaged in 2003 by the terrorist bomb which killed the consul-general and several of his staff. Since then it has been restored, but now the consul-general's apartment has been made into the visa section, so Deborah K. Jones, the present consul-general, will move into the ambassador's state rooms, which means that when our man in Ankara visits – which he often does – he will have to stay in an hotel. Is this an economy? Local residents wonder why the visa section could not have been housed in the poor old Architect's House, or somewhere else in the city. Meanwhile, a hideous new fortified gatehouse has been built, involving the unnecessary felling of trees in the grounds of Pera House, and the boundary walls have been rebuilt and are now covered in tasteless yellow and blue tiles.

PS: After my last article reporting the threat to the Architect's House, the consul-general convened a meeting at which she accused someone in the room of writing it while insisting, of course, that it was full of errors. I can assure her she is quite wrong. It was written by me, here in London.

BACK in Britain, the fate of historic buildings is increasingly endangered by the government's disinclination to list any more of them and, indeed, by its enthusiasm for granting certificates of immunity from listing.

For example, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media 'n' Sport Tessa Jowell has recently declined to list the Walter Bodmer Building in Oxford, the former Physiology Laboratory of 1884 by T.N. Deane. No reason was given, but the decision is convenient for the University of Oxford, which hopes to build a large new science building next door. Yet English Heritage, cowed as it is by government hostility and budget cuts, recommended listing on both architectural and historical grounds – a unanimous decision made both by officers and its advisory committee. The DCMS has no expert advisers of its own, which is precisely why its statutory adviser on listing cases is English Heritage – who, in this case, argued that listing the Walter Bodmer Building "need not preclude the provision of a world class science facility".

How and why does Ms Jowell know better?

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM
MODERNISM: DESIGNING A NEW WORLD. 1914-1939
So let's get this straight. After Modernism, we had Post-Modernism.
Right.
And then as a reaction, Post-Post-Modernism.
Which is effectively Pre-Post-Modernism.
So we're back to Modernism, surely?
If only it was that simple.

I-SPY *Bristol Royal Infirmary*

Submitted by Paul Stevens. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

TRAVELLING musicians have finally had enough of the Gestapo-like treatment the Americans mete out to anyone who wants to visit their country.

Be you never so grand – the finest pianist in the world or the most venerable conductor – to apply for a visa you still have to turn up at dawn, queue in the street for several hours and then shuffle through barbed wire and security booths manned by gun-waving goons, only to find yourself queuing again in a large hall where other goons bark instructions and reduce people to tears because their papers aren't in the right order or have been stapled in the wrong place or their chin is 2 millimetres too close to the bottom of the photo.

Designed to intimidate and cause problems for people who spend their lives on the road, it can't be done by post or through intermediaries. Defiantly, the Halle Orchestra has now cancelled what would have been a major tour to the US on the grounds that the visa application process is now absurd. It would have meant bringing every player down from Manchester to London for the dawn queue, incurring overnight stays, travel costs and fees totalling £15,000 – just for the privilege for being processed.

Orchestras simply don't have that kind of money to squander. As the Halle's chief executive John Summers says: "The requirements have made touring to the US unfeasible. So we'll tour to Europe instead."

Concert promoters in mainland Europe are beginning to think the same way. After bad experiences of shunting entire orchestras around Germany to shuffle in visa queues, the leading Hanover promoter Konzertdirektion Schmidt has confirmed that "we're not planning to take any more orchestras to the US in the near future". And their stand is backed by the London-based International Artists Management Association, which has issued a statement that "the US authorities need to wake up to reality".

And the reality is that America now faces the prospect of cultural boycott. Dismayed by the visa process and alarmed by stories of the Americans arresting innocent travellers for trifling irregularities in their documentation and sending them home (it happened a few years ago to David James, the countertenor from the Hilliard Ensemble, who was frogmarched on to a jumbo-jet in handcuffs), musicians are deciding the US isn't worth the trouble. And they're right.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Music for Good Friday
14th April at 7pm
HANDLES PASSION
&
VIVALDI'S GLORIA
St Mark's Church, Tunbridge Wells

Down on the Farm

THE tragi-farce which ensued when, on 29 March, a decomposing dead swan was found floating in the harbour of Cellardyke, a little former fishing port on the coast of East Fife, gave us a chilling vision of the competence with which Defra would be likely to respond to any serious outbreak of bird flu.

It took the department more than a week to identify the cause of death as what the media love to call the "deadly H5N1 strain" of avian flu virus (and slightly longer to identify the swan itself as a migratory whooper rather than a resident mute). The Scottish Executive, acting on Defra's advice, promptly went into overdrive, declaring nearly 1,000 square miles of central Scotland as a "protection zone" (although it naturally preferred to describe this as "2,500 square kilometres"). And 175 poultry keepers within the zone were ordered to keep all their 3m birds indoors, including 260,000 free-range chickens, ducks and geese.

For several days suspense mounted as Defra checked out several more dead birds. The media had a field day in speculating how an epidemic of the "deadly H5N1 virus" might soon be exploding across Britain. Only gradually did it transpire that the poor whooper was a solitary example, which had probably been washed, already dead, across the North Sea from Germany; and that, far from being the start of an epidemic, H5N1 had probably not yet reached Britain at all.

But already several alarming pointers had emerged from the official response. One was the speed with which those ever-trigger happy Defra officials had leaped to close off such a vast area of Scotland, even before the extent of the threat had been properly assessed. Ordering more than a quarter-of-a-million free-range birds to be confined day and night in cramped dark sheds and henhouses is no joke. It soon gives rise to serious welfare problems, with frustrated birds pecking each other to death.

More serious still was the way this episode confirmed Defra's basic approach to bird flu. In an uncanny echo of the 2001 foot and mouth disaster, its official mind is still firmly set against vaccination, which could have been used to create a ring of immunity round Cellardyke. Just as in 2001, we were treated to a stream of official disinformation about how vaccination doesn't really work, because it simply masks the spread of the disease. All the evidence confirms that this is rubbish, and that vaccination is extremely effective, immunising most birds completely and reducing the infectivity of the rest almost to vanishing point.

Still at the forefront of Defra's thinking is that obsession with killing on a colossal scale which, back to salmonella and beyond, has always been the ministry's preferred answer to every animal disease problem. If bird flu were to become established in Britain, we could expect ministry vets soon to fan out across the land, ordering the slaughter of millions of birds. But already Defra's chief vet Debby Reynolds has been quick to reassure us. "I should like you to know," she tells us, "that I believe all killing for disease control should be done humanely in accordance with EU law." It was perhaps unfortunate, however, that she went on to say that, for this, "the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter and Killing) Regulations 1995 provides a firm legal base". We remember only too vividly how, under Maff's orders in 2001, millions of healthy animals were knifed, shot or bludgeoned to death in flagrant contravention of those same regulations, without a single person ever being prosecuted.

'Muckspreader'

Letters

Private Eye

Dissatisfied customer

Sir,

*Don't you think there are **many** more serious/important subjects that could be featured on your cover than Boris Johnson and his shenanigans?*

*Private Eye (I'm sorry about this) is a constant disappointment. There are so many **extremely** serious issues on the go. Authoritarian legislation being introduced by New Labour on the quiet and at great speed. We have a dwindling democracy and privatisation creeping about us like a disease.*

People need facts, facts, and more facts, put simply and presented in a modern style. Your layout is boring and old-fashioned. It could do with a good shake-up. Would a weekly with less copy not be possible?

I care about what I am saying because I know a lot of young people who are politically minded, but wouldn't dream of buying Private Eye.

We need Private Eye, there are a lot of possible readers out there. Our society needs help to protect itself just now. Blair and Co will be delighted to see Boris lampooned again.

Keep your eye on the ball. We need you.

Sincerely,
TESSA BENNETT,

Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Violent reaction

Sir,

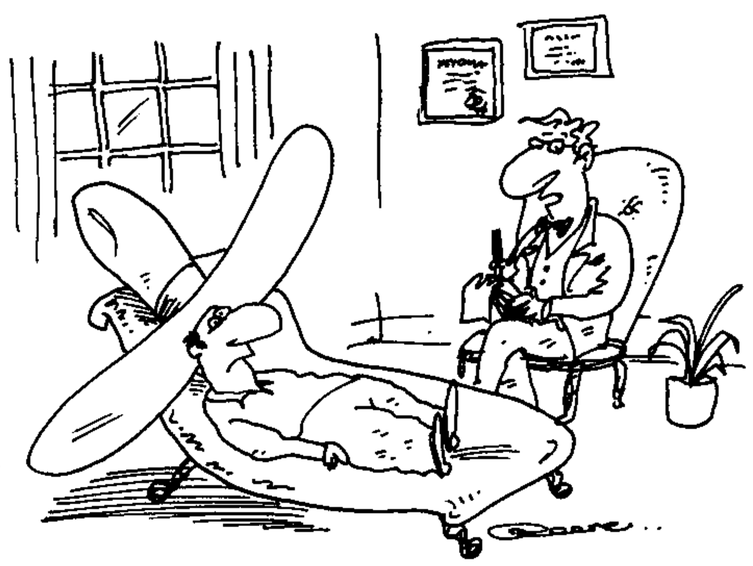
Pauline Campbell's claim in her letter ("Custody scandal", Eye 1156) that her daughter Sarah was "convicted of a non-violent offence" leading to her imprisonment and subsequent death in custody is understandable from the point of view of her campaign, but presents a distorted picture of the crime concerned.

The "non-violent offence" actually involved being part of a group of people who approached a 72-year-old man, Amrit Bhandari, and demanded money from him. When he refused, one member of the group began shouting that Mr Bhandari had raped her. Mr Bhandari was so terrified by this that he had a fatal heart attack. While he lay dying, Sarah Campbell and another women stole his wallet and credit cards.

One suspects that many people would dispute Ms Campbell's definition of aggressive behaviour which killed a pensioner as "non-violent" – though not, presumably, any of the journalists responsible for a number of recent sympathetic articles on Sarah Campbell, none of which has bothered to include similar consideration of the appalling death of Mr Bhandari and its effect on his family.

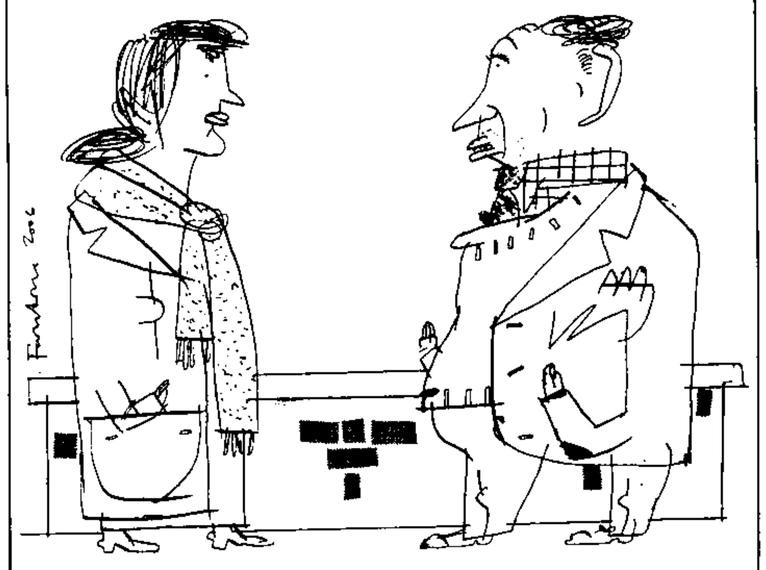
Yours faithfully,
JANE FERRELL,

Via email.



"I think you're over-compensating"

Scenes You Seldom See



"An NHS dentist has just opened in the High Street"

Vaccine shot

Sir,

I am a biochemical engineer at UCL. Last year I completed a masters degree, and my design project was on production of an avian flu vaccine. I noticed the Tamiflu comment in this week's "Gnome" column.

Are you aware of the fact that this is in fact not a vaccine, but an antiviral drug which inhibits neuramidase (the N part of H5N1). I know this is a joke, but I am getting really sick of this falsehood penetrating the media. I know you like to pick up on other people's errors, so I thought I would point out your own.

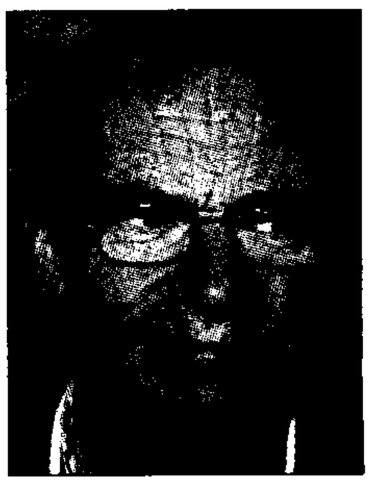
*Also, on the same page, I noticed a typo: "You can't believe a **world** the public says" in the cartoon. Have your proof readers had one too many late nights this week?*

Still enjoying Private Eye, even if you have dropped the baton this week!

Yours faithfully,
ESTHER FORD,

Research Engineer, Dept of Biochemical Engineering, UCL.

Lookalike



Provenzano

Archer

Sir,

Do Italian crooks resemble British crooks? I think Mafia boss Bernado Provenzano and convicted felon Jeffrey Archer could share common genes. I demand a DNA test.

ALAN BUNTING,

Harpenden, Herts.

Kosova vs. Kosovo

Sir,

If your correspondent from Pristina was truly desiring an independent state then he would know that the state would be called Kosova. Kosovo is the Serbian name for it, and some Kosova Albanians find the use of it quite offensive.

Yours,
IAIN HOLMS,

Via email.

Soccer balls

Sir,

I take offence at the implication in this week's "Dumb Britain" item that lack of knowledge of football managers comprises dumbness. The fact that I neither know, nor care to know, the colour, nationality, height, complexion or personal habits of any manager of any football team anywhere in the world does not mean that I am dumb. On the contrary, it demonstrates intelligence in that I have far better things to do with my time than waste it on the boring and pointless activity known as football. Who is Ron Atkinson anyway?

Yours,
ANTHONY HAWKINS,
Hook, Hampshire.

Sir,

Dumb Britain (1156) may well be correct to ridicule the contestant's response to the question asking for the name of the first black manager of a Premier League side. Perhaps the contestant's response of Ron Atkinson was particularly stupid. Or, given Atkinson – former WBA, Man Utd, Coventry City manager and long-term ITV pundit – lost his ITV contract for off-camera but sadly for him on-mike comments deemed racist about a black player, perhaps the contestant's response was in fact rather smart black humour.

DR LYNDON SIMKIN,
Warwick University.

Photo opportunity

Sir,

It is disheartening to hear that the arrival of bird flu in this country means we may no longer handle birds, and that cats, a common predator of birds, may also catch the bug should they touch them.

I am curious to know if you have any pictures in your archives of a common predator handling an exotic bird with care?

Yours,
DUNCAN GAULD,
Via email.

Professor A.C. railing

Sir,

Not that it much matters, except perhaps to those misled by the chevelure, but AC is only DC (Eye 1156).

Straightly yours,
A.C. GRAYLING,
Via email.

"I am not old-fashioned and insular; in fact my wife and I shall visit Gaul this year"

Organ grinder

Sir,

Lunchtime O'Boulez is quite correct in drawing attention to the feeble response of the DTI in regards to the proposed ban on the use of lead in pipe organs but omits to mention the response given by Malcolm Wicks MP, Secretary of State for Energy in the Department of Trade & Industry, at parliamentary questions on 27 March in response to a question by Robert Key MP for Salisbury and South Wiltshire, that "pipe organs that do not rely on electricity to operate would not be caught within the scope of this directive".

Presumably such instruments must also have their music desks illuminated by candlelight and perhaps would be a useful palliative to out of work European organ blowers, or as a job creation scheme to help our deprived inner-city schools put practical musical work experience back on the map as organ pumpers, and keeping them fit at the same time.

Yours (under fifteen inches of wind),
IAN HOCKLEY,
Via email.

Slippery characters...

Sir,

The Funny Old World column achieved new heights of surrealism in this week's Eye (1156) with the piece about the aliens allegedly robbing slippers from schoolgirls' lockers in Japan. As if the allegation weren't already improbable enough, the translators/transcribers from the original Japanese comments of Nirasawa-san have clearly confused Venusians with Venetians.

"Venetians (sic) have friendly feelings towards earthlings and they like slippers, but somehow I don't think it's them. No, this is the work of Martians."

A Doge-y allegation, if ever I saw one, although you've got to admit that it's ***slightly*** *more likely that some holidaying gondolier with a foot fetish nicked the slippers than that they were taken by a being from Venus. More likely to have ended up in St Mark's than on Mars, too...*

Then again, bearing in mind that the Japanese actually have vending machine that sell used schoolgirls' knickers, I'm bound to say that I think the culprit is much more likely to have been a locally bred pervert with a master key to all the lockers...

It is indeed a funny old world!

Yours aye,
PAUL BLEZARD,
Richmond.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"And Vijay Singh lampoons another one down the fairway..."
KEN BROWN, BBC
(Peter Coomber)

"They [Arsenal] have to concentrate not only when they have the ball or when their opponents have the ball, but also when neither of them has the ball."
GRAHAM TAYLOR, Radio 5 Live
(Ashley Boroda)

"All the other speculation is pure speculation."
ALAN CURBISHLEY, BBC1
(Michael Smidman)

"This half Liverpool are attacking their fans, who are packed into the away end."
Commentator, Radio 5 Live
(Alexander Turrell)

"I don't know where this Arctic wind has come from, but it's freezing."
ALAN GREEN, Radio 5 Live
(Glenn Hoggarth)

SOLUTIONS

"Personalising Technology Solutions" – *home computers*

"Thirst Management Solution Provider" – *drinks*

"Furniture-solutions.com" – *furniture*

"Commercial blasting solutions" – *explosives*

"Stage One of Chamber solution begins" – *mending the collapsed roof of the Scottish Parliament*

All submitted by readers

"I was told you just gave them an injection"

LUVVIES

"When you get to a certain stature in your life, in your career, and you're too much in people's faces, it can be like eating your favourite food too much. What I want to do with this album is not be too bright and brilliant. The good songs are in there – you just have to discover them for yourself."

JAMIE FOXX,
Guardian

Submitted by Alexandra Trifkovic.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Lookalike

SAMSUNG topshield

Sir,

Following on from your exposé in Eye 1156's Pseuds Corporate on the complex blend of creativity, attitude adjustment and caring that went into the creation of Samsung's corporate logo, is it possible that it is in any way related to the logo of Forbo SA's protecting finish for linoleum "flooring solutions", topshield? I think they should be told.

Yours graphically,
JONATHAN GURD,
Via email.

EXPERIENCE WAITRESS REQUIERED

ENGLISH ESSENTUAL

Shop window (London N4)

Letter from **Canberra**

from Our Own Correspondent

THE rest of the world may have forgotten that we were the third partner in the coalition of the willing that invaded Iraq, but life is now becoming awkward for the hitherto Teflon-coated government of John Howard thanks to a scandal potentially as embarrassing as the Downing Street memos or the abuses at Abu Ghraib.

Howard – known as "the Gollum" because of his refusal to give up the "ring" of office after a decade – has shrugged off qualms about our involvement in the Middle East with heroic assertions that we need to "see the job through" and that Aussies never "cut and run". In fact our small contingent of 750 soldiers in Iraq is currently protecting Japan's non-combatant army engineers and performing other marginal duties. It has avoided conflict with the insurgency, so popular opinion here has not been tested by the return of Aussies in body bags.

Our Iraq scandal concerns self-interest and greed. In the build-up to the invasion, Howard and Foreign Minister Alexander Downer never missed a chance to berate the United Nations for its inadequate weapons inspections and its ineffectual sanctions – especially the oil-for-food programme. But it is our own involvement in corrupting that very same humanitarian mission, to preserve our precious export trade, that could eventually land Howard in the shit.

As revealed by Volcker inquiry last year, our monopoly wheat exporter – a former government quango called the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) – was able to supply Iraq with grain by bunging Saddam Hussein's regime more than £100m in kickbacks. These were characterised as legitimate "payments" from the UN's escrow account, but were in fact paid in US dollars to Alia, a "Jordanian" trucking company which then passed them to Saddam in contravention of resolution 661. So while Howard was telling us why it was so important to get rid of a corrupt tyrant who had a "people-shredding machine", he and his ministers were turning a blind eye to one of the mechanisms by which that corruption was sustained for six or seven years.

Howard may yet get away with it, of course. For he set up a royal commission under a former judge, Terence Cole, to investigate the Volcker findings – but only as they relate to AWB and other companies (including the world's biggest steel producer, BHP-Billiton, which also indulged in the palm-greasing), and not the government.

To set the record straight Cole summoned Howard and two of his ministers to explain themselves. Despite a paper trail of memos and emails with government prints all over them, all three could "not recall" being told anything about AWB's scam. Howard went so far as to say he had always assumed the company's "great reputation" was deserved.

Trade Minister Mark Vaile insulted the commission saying he was too "busy" to read the 21 cables from UN and other sources identifying the conspiracy, and Foreign Minister Downer offered the ultimate in arrogance: he'd have to be pretty hard up for reading matter to be checking out cables, he said.

This was a pity since some of them revealed that our intelligence agencies certainly knew what AWB was up to. On the eve of the invasion, in March 2003, Howard blithely announced that he too knew Saddam Hussein was "cynically and cruelly" manipulating the oil-for-food programme. But if he hadn't read the cables, how did he know?

Foreign Minister Downer will give evidence to the inquiry in Sydney next week. But its terms of reference still only relate to AWB and other companies, not the government. And if anything too disturbing is revealed, the chance is that most of Australia will either be asleep on the beach or at the footy.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

O"These Polaroid photos show close-ups of the genitals of an older white male," Detective Francis Baird told reporters in Clinton, Massachusetts, "and so far that's all we have to go on. The photo flasher began leaving them in Shaw's supermarket about a year ago, but they're tucked away in the most unpredictable places. Some were found hanging up with the polony sausage strings by the deli counter, some have been found in aisle three near the cookies, and others in aisles seven and eight, mixed in with the dish detergent and cleaning products. So far, he's left more than twenty, but there's no certain spot that he keeps returning to, otherwise we'd be monitoring that spot.
"The problem is, right now, that we don't know who we are on the alert for. Presumably, the photo flasher must be getting some sort of sexual pleasure from leaving these pictures of his genitals where female shoppers are likely to find them, but we're not even certain that that constitutes a criminal offence. At this time, no specific individual comes to mind, but if anyone who may have worked at this supermarket would like to give themselves up and confess, please do give me a call." *(Boston Herald, 15/2/06. Spotter: A.J. Smith)*

– O –

O The case of the disappearing teaspoons: longitudinal cohort study of the displacement of teaspoons in an Australian research institute.

ABSTRACT

Objectives: *To determine the overall rate of loss of workplace teaspoons and whether attrition and displacement are correlated with the relative value of the teaspoons or type of tearoom.*

Design: *Longitudinal cohort study.*

Setting: *Research institute employing about 140 people.*

Subjects: *70 discreetly numbered teaspoons placed in tearooms around the institute and observed weekly over five months.*

Main outcome measures: *Incidence of teaspoon loss per 100 teaspoon years and teaspoon half life.*

Results: *56 (80%) of the 70 teaspoons disappeared during the study. The half life of the teaspoons was 81 days. The half life of teaspoons in communal tearooms (42 days) was significantly shorter than those in rooms associated with particular research groups (77 days). The rate of loss was not influenced by the teaspoons' value. The incidence of teaspoon loss over the period of observation was 360.62 per 100 teaspoon years. At this rate, an estimated 250 teaspoons would need to be purchased annually to maintain a practical institute-wide population of 70 teaspoons.*

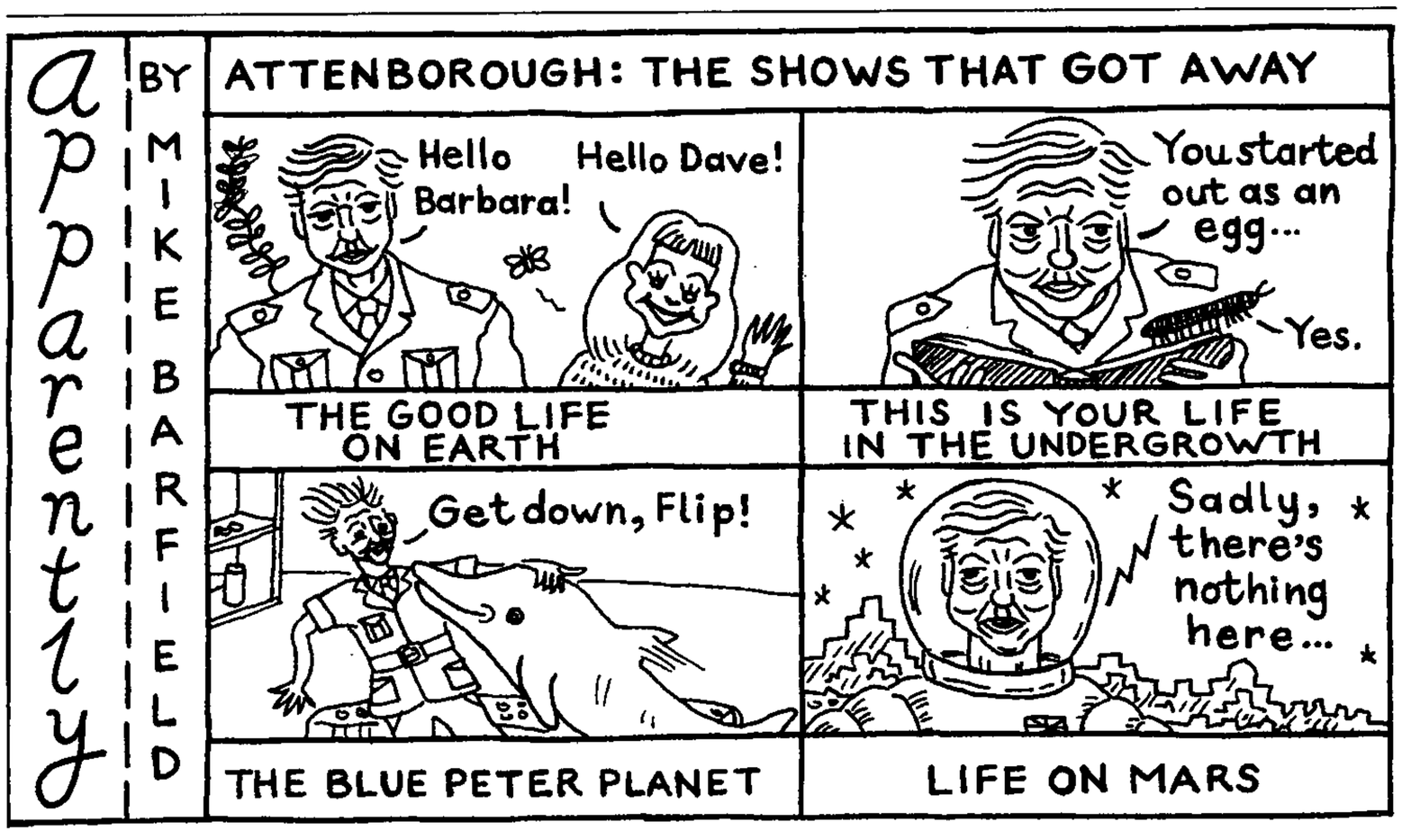
Conclusions: *The loss of workplace teaspoons was rapid, showing that their availability, and hence office culture in general, is constantly threatened."* (British Medical Journal, 24-31 December 2005. Spotter: Glyn Strange)

– O –

O"This is what can happen when people don't think things through," Lt. James McDonagh of the Calhoun County Sheriff's Department told a press conference in Michigan. "The driver got lost this morning in the Leroy Township area, and when he backed into a field to turn around near J Drive South, his Mercury sedan became stuck in the mud. After several futile

attempts to free his car, with his rear wheels just spinning around, he suddenly thought of a way to get the vehicle out of the mud. But in retrospect, he can see now that it wasn't a very bright idea.

"He placed his toolbox on the accelerator to rev the engine, then got behind the car, and tried to push it free. He was successful in freeing the vehicle, but hadn't thought about how he would then regain control of it. Once it was out of the mud, the Mercury sedan accelerated across a cut soybean field, killing a cow in the process, while the man ran helplessly behind. It travelled half a mile, reaching an estimated speed of 100mph and sometimes becoming airborne, before crashing into a tree. The impact crushed the car back to the windshield, which is how we could estimate the speed. No tickets were issued, and we won't be releasing the driver's name. He's suffered enough already." *(Battle Creek Enquirer, 29/12/05. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo *(and not, you'll note, "Hullo, hullo, hullo"!),*

Let me make it clear once and for all that I have not been arrested!

Just because a police car was seen outside the vicarage last week, and two police officers came in for a little chat, does not mean that I face a lengthy gaol sentence!

I've heard of people jumping to conclusions but, honestly, how stupid can you get?

Lots of people have police officers round for tea, so why shouldn't your vicar?

Just because they stayed for twelve hours and took away my computer and bank statements, doesn't mean I'm some sort of common criminal, or that they've "got anything on me"!

No, this whole thing is a storm in a teacup, as my friend Mr Levy from the tennis club made absolutely clear when he had the police round for a friendly cup of tea as well!

And, let's be honest, if anyone has questions to answer about recent donations to parish funds, then it's not me, it's Mr Levy.

Goodness me, I can't do everything here! I know some people think I'm superhuman, but I can't be on duty 24/7, can I?

I have to delegate some things to other people, and, frankly, arranging much-needed loans from local businessmen is very much one of them – as is finding people who are generous enough to sponsor the St Albion's Beacon Academy of Excellence (formerly the Herbert Morrison Comprehensive).

Remember the Vicar's manifesto promise? "Perspiration, perspiration, perspiration"! D.H.

And talking of how busy I am trying to do everything else around here, it's no surprise that I occasionally break into a bit of sweat!

It doesn't mean, I hasten to add, that I'm sweating because the police are after me because of what Mr Levy and those businessmen have been up to!

Not at all! And anyway, I wasn't sweating. It was a very hot day, and I had just come in from the rain!

So naturally there was a little bit of moisture pouring down my face, and it

was nothing whatever to do with being worried about going to gaol for a long time – because that's what Mr Levy is going to be doing, if anyone goes to prison, which of course they're not going to!

And, anyway, if anyone still thinks that I've got something to hide about this business, then perhaps they should listen to the independent opinion of my friend Mr Falconer, our parish solicitor, who is a very expert lawyer.

As he said in a written statement to some police officers who came round to see him for tea; "the vicar is entirely innocent of all charges, as am I, and we have at all times acted in good faith. It is now time to move on."

Yours in the clear, Tony

ADVERTISEMENT

✂ IT'S A SNIP! ✂

Monsieur André is offering his customers a full hair and beauty treatment for a special discount introductory price of only £7,700. Says one satisfied customer, Mrs C.B. of the vicarage, "This is terrific value for money because the parish is paying for me!"

"It'll be the highlights of your week!" says Monsieur André (formerly Sid Boggins of "Salon Pudding Basin", the Railway Arches).

The Collection is now being supervised by some new servers! As seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM THE VICAR'S WIFE

I wish to make it clear that the refurbishment of the vicarage was not some frivolous make-over, as some people have been trying to suggest, but a long-overdue and much-needed renovation of the building which stands at the centre of parish life. As you all know, the vicar and I have to entertain many important people from the parish, not to mention foreign visitors. If, for instance, Tony needs to give an audience to the editor of our local paper, Miss Rebekah Filth, it is only right that he should be able to do so in a suitably large room and sitting in a golden throne. Anyone who thinks that the modest cost of £2,816,000 for these essential improvements was a misuse of parish funds should be aware that they run the risk of receiving a writ of scandalum magnatum under Section 25 of the Human Rights of the Vicar's Wife Act 2006, which prohibits criticism of the vicar's wife on any grounds whatever.

Cherie Booth QC
Makerich Chambers, ('Rights R Us').

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

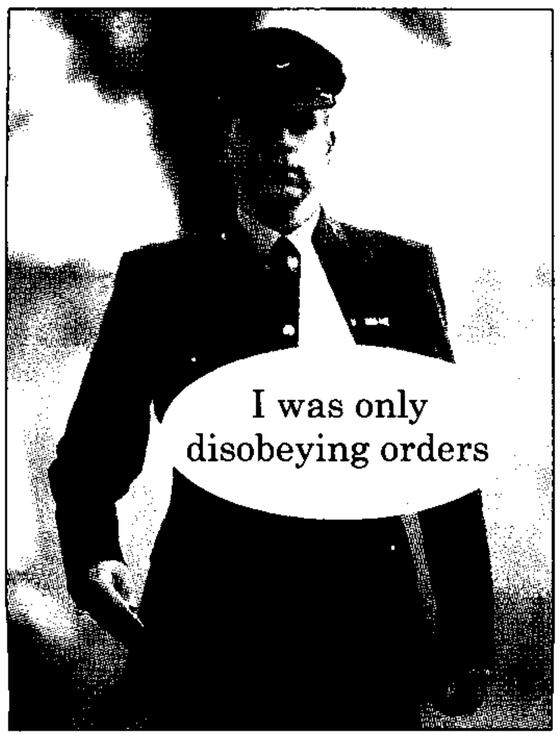
I was outraged last week to be compelled to attend a PCC enquiry into my activities as "Blue Sky" supremo on behalf of the vicar. I explained at some length that "I was engaged in establishing a management policy interface across the resource matrix as a subset of strategic overview development." Unfortunately my slow-witted inquisitors seemed quite unable to grasp what I was talking about, so making the whole exercise a complete waste of time. Someone of my importance really has got better things to do than look out the window and talk nonsense (is this right? D.H.)

J. Birt
The Old Lunatic System,
Accenture Road.

WARNING

As you may know, I have recently entered into an email debate with Mr Henry Pooter of the St Albion Observer and Advertiser on the subject of whether I am a threat to civil liberties! Whilst recognising that Mr Pooter is at liberty to hold his ridiculous views, I am equally at liberty to point out to him that I know where he lives! T.B.

RAF OFFICER IMPRISONED FOR WAR CRIME



"With this new blue screen graphics package, I can sit like this and superimpose a girlfriend..."

THAT TOM CRUISE BABY NAME EXPLAINED IN FULL

Suri – means *'princess'* in Hebrew, *'red rose'* in Persian and *'quasher of nasty rumours'* in Hollywood.

NEW 'LOANS FOR PEERAGE' INVESTIGATION

by Our Political Staff **Lunchtime O'Sleaze**

THE PRIME Minister has been accused of further corruption as the honours-for-cronies row deepens.

It was claimed last night that Dr Who was only created a Time Lord after making a loan to the Labour Party.

Said one disgruntled Dalek, "Dr Who lent the Prime Minister his Tardis so that Tony could go back in time and re-generate himself by turning into Mrs Thatcher."

Excuse to put in picture of Billie Piper

A spokesman for the Time Lord said, "I really can't remember the circumstances of the loan. It was all a long time in the future."

RUMSFELD TO DEFEND HIMSELF

by Our Washington Staff **N.E. O'Con**

THE US Secretary of State for Defence, Mr Donald Rumsfeld, once described as the President's "extreme right-hand man" has revealed his strategy in response to an attack on him by a number of US generals.

He told reporters, "I am acting in self defence, so I am fully entitled to locate these officers' houses and bomb them off the face of the earth.

"Should they or their relatives survive the initial shock 'n' awe operation, I will then be forced to lock them up with bags over their heads and torture them to death with dogs."

He continued, "This will send a clear message to the world that this administration will not tolerate any acts of aggression against myself."

Late News

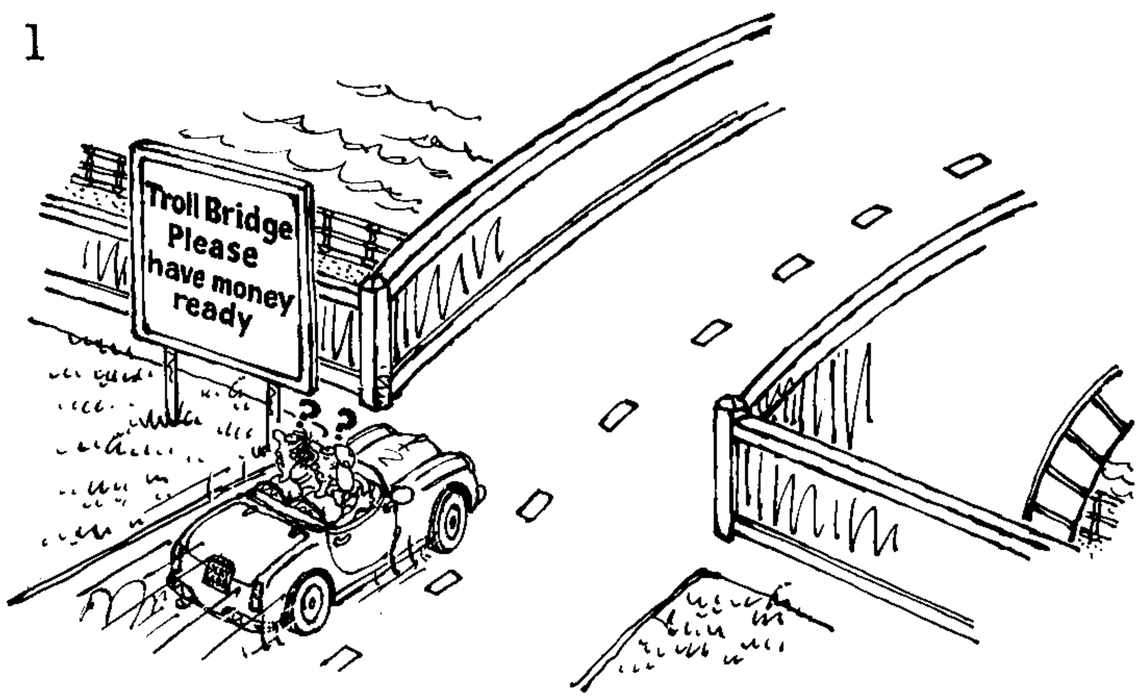
IRAN SHOCK

GEORGE BUSH has today assured the American people that, despite numerous press reports, the US has drawn up no precise battle plan for an invasion of Iran.

"We have no strategy in place for such an attack, which means the troops go in tomorrow," said President

(cont. p. 94)

1



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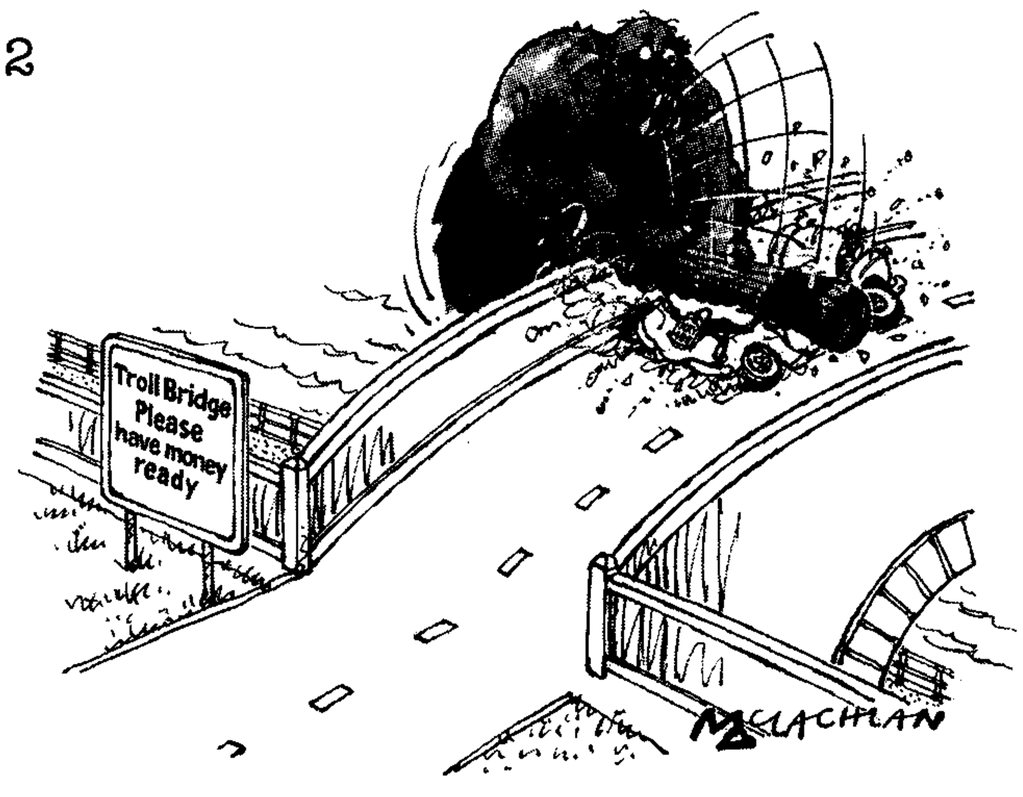


Who should be the new presenter of Desert Island Discs? YOU DECIDE

SUE LAWLEY has left the hot-seat of the nation's favourite radio programme and the hunt is on for her replacement as Miss Musical Memory Lane. Should it be:

- **Davina McCall**
- **Jimmy Carr**
- **Johnny Vegas**
- **Chris Evans**
- **Bruce Forsyth**
- **Cat Deeley**
- **Johnny Vaughan**
- **Chris Moyles**
- **Sharon Osbourne**
- **Ant and/or Dec**
- **The late Roy Plomley**

Phone now on 018743 24274237 and make your vote count in the search for the new Sue Leggy.

POT CALLS KETTLE 'CHAMELEON'

by Our Political Staff **Alastair Chamebelleon** and **Boy George Osborne**

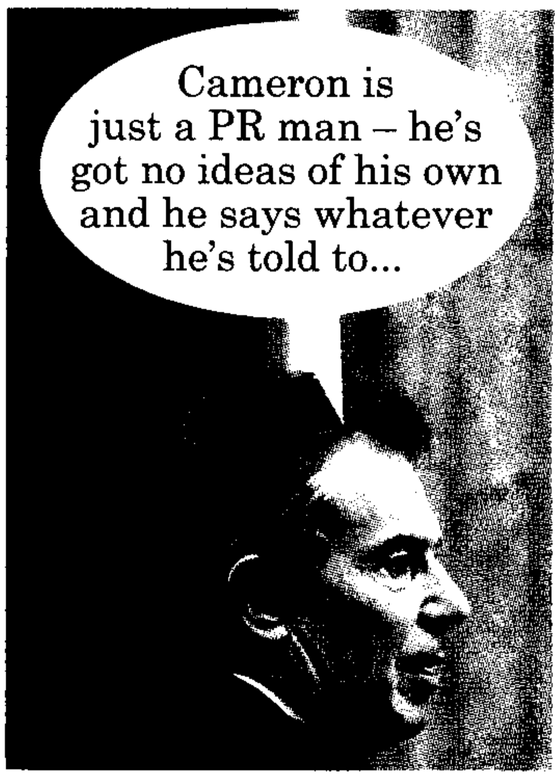
MR Tony Pot today attacked Mr David Kettle for "changing colour" in the hope of becoming more popular.

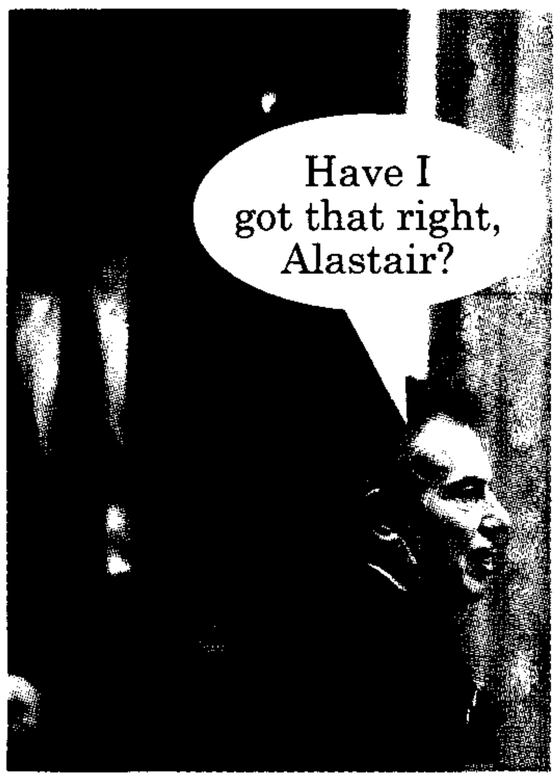
"Kettle," he said, "will do anything to please the voters. He started off as copper and has now turned completely black.

"How unlike myself," he continued, "who has always been true black and was never any other colour at all."

Cartoony Blair

Commentators said that Mr Pot's performance marked a new low in British politics. Said one, "For Mr Pot to call Mr Kettle black is a case of the Blair calling the Cameron a chameleon".





EXCLUSIVE TO THE DAILY TORYGRAPH

Tony Blair Sinks To New Low With Personal Attacks On David Cameron

On Other Pages ● Tony Blair's sweat revealed to be as poisonous as an African toad **14** ● New photo reveals that Cherie Blair is uglier than Medusa **27** ● John Prescott eats orphans baked in a pie **30**

POLLY FILLER

IT's official! The Statistics Bureau has released the latest figure for nannies and it has hit 100,000! Yes, 100,000! And that's just the ones I've employed.

But why all the surprise from so-called "informed" commentators who are shocked by this "new" social trend?

Some of us have been writing acutely observed and yet humorous sideways accounts of the nanny phenomenon for the last five years. Some of us have even published best-selling collections of our wry take on the whole childcare/lifestyle/work balance under titles such as: *Nanny State!* (Pearson and Johnson £7.99), *Nanny Get Your Mum!* (Johnson and Pearson, £8.99), and the award-winning *Nanny Hands Make Light Work!* (Tyrell and Tyrell £17.99).

The reason that most of these pundits have failed to spot the rise of the nanny is because they are **men**. And guess what? They're useless.

So while the rest of us have been busy hiring and firing the likes of the hopeless Danubia from Bavaria (who had to go because she was in floods of tears the whole time!), our useless partners have been oblivious to the "Nannifestation"(!!) because they have been slumped in front of the plasma screen watching *Extreme Shopping Trolley Racing from Dubai* hosted by Paul Ross and Richard Hammond on BBC1 *(surely "Sky Drivel 6"? No. Ed.)*

And, for the information of the useless and no-doubt male compilers of Nanny Statistics, the number is *actually* 100,001 because, since starting this column, I've had to fire Orfana from Chad for scratching the 4x4 (surely these girls don't *walk* across the desert, do they?) and hired N'Derpaid from Chad instead, who at least has a lot of experience looking after young children (her ten brothers and sisters apparently!).

So, come on, you male columnists – can't you write about something else?

● Polly Filler's new collection *Love Is A Nanny Splendoured Thing!* is published by Useless Simon and Schuster £19.99.

Product Recall UKIP

As a precautionary measure, we are recalling the following product – **The UK Independence Party** – because it has been found to contain nuts. We apologise for any inconvenience this may have caused to our voters.

CHINESE PRESIDENT MEETS BILL GATES

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Alida Valli, Italian Film Star Who Played Harry Lime's Girlfriend in *The Third Man.*

So. Farewell
Then
Alida Valli.

Yes, you
Played Harry Lime's
Girlfriend in *The*
Third Man.

All together
Now –

"Dunka dunka dunk
Ka-Dunk.

Dunka dunka dunk
Ka-Dunk."

Etc.

E.J. The Thribb Man (78 rpm)

GOVERNMENT TO HOLD STATE FUNERAL FOR LAST SURVIVOR OF WAR

by Our Defence Staff **Tommy Atkins**

IN AN imaginative gesture, Tony Blair has responded to calls for a special ceremony to honour the last British serviceman left alive in Iraq.

He has promised a full State funeral as soon as possible for the next soldier to die in what he called "My Great War".

"This will be a fitting tribute to all those members of 'The Lost Generation' – and once we have got this out of the way we can draw a line and move on to remembering something more positive – i.e. myself."

Writing exclusively for the Eye

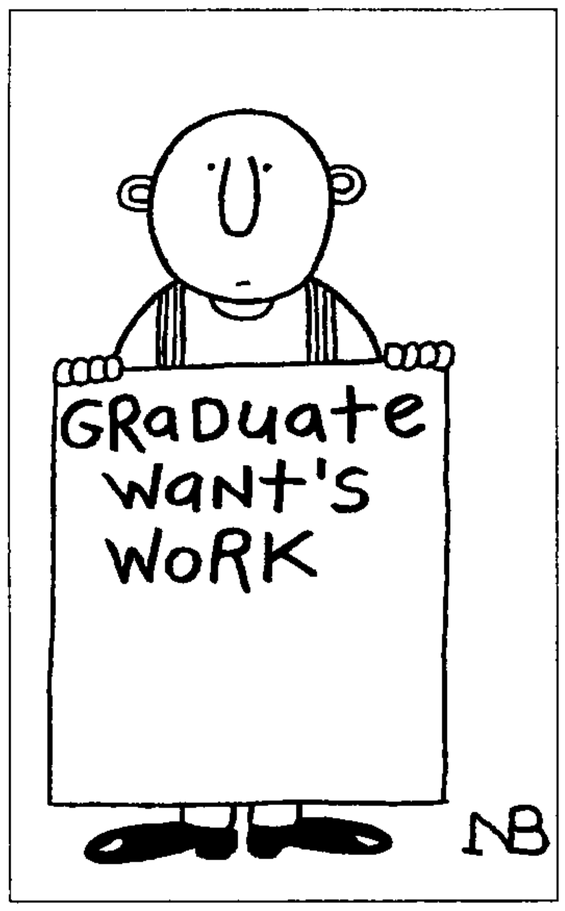
NORTON MYDAY MP

You remember him. He was in that BBC4 documentary.

DAVID CAMERON's call for the electorate to vote Conservative and "go green" in the upcoming local elections has been condemned in some sections of the press as nothing more than brazen opportunism.

But Cameron's commitment to the environment has my full support. During my years as Minister of Energy, I always prided myself on my green credentials. I prided myself on putting the needs of the environment first. In fact, I regularly sought the advice of the leading environmental pressure group of the day, the Wombles.

Many's the evening I'd stop at Wimbledon Common to seek advice from our furred brethren. It was during these discussions in Uncle Bulgaria's den, just behind the gents', that an unfortunate mis-



understanding occurred, and I sadly lost my post in the next reshuffle.

Nevertheless, I continued to lobby loudly for a "greener government" and, as Minister for Northern Ireland, I insisted that bin bags were available on every street corner of the Falls Road for the disposal of rubbish and, believe me, rarely a day went by when the enthusiastic local residents didn't make sure those bags were full to bursting and *(You're not fired. Ed.)*.

HEWITT'S 'DIGNITY NURSES' Their Role In Full

❶To ensure that all tiresome old people will be treated with dignity, despite their being awkward, deaf, incontinent and probably ill.

❷This duty will be carried out by a designated "dignity nurse", whose task will be to explain to the old people (by shouting in their good ear if they have one) that there are no beds (because they are full of tiresome old people like them) and that the sooner they go home to die in dignity the better it will be for everyone.

❸If the tiresome old people insist on staying in hospital, despite all the advice they have been given by the dignity nurse, they are to be informed that the hospital has unfortunately been earmarked for closure due to the Chancellor's massive investment in the NHS.

❹Er...

❺That's it.

A Doctor Writes

AS A doctor, I'm often asked, "Would you like a new Mercedes? I've got this beautiful new 5-series in the showroom and you're welcome to pop in, Doctor, at any time, or, since I know you don't come out any more, I can easily bring it up to the surgery, it's a wonderful car, silver-grey, with white leather interior and walnut trim, built-in satnav and DVD player, no, and the price we're asking, on your salary you wouldn't even notice. I sold one just like it to Terry Wogan last week, of course he doesn't get your money, but then who does? Ha! Ha! Ha! Alright, I'll be round at half-eleven, when you finish."

© A. Car Salesman 2006.

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES

Wee Willie Winkie runs through the town,

Stuff him full of ritalin and calm him down!

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam – Lines On The Defeat Of Mr Silvio Berlusconi in the Italian General Election.

So. Farewell then
Signor Berlusconi.

So. Farewell then
Signor Berlusconi.

I said, "So. Farewell then
Signor Berlusconi."

The message seems
To be taking
Rather a long time
To sink in.

E.J. Thribbi
(17½ million votes)

EIGHTY THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

(one for each year of her glorious reign)

Since she was 3 years old, the Queen has owned no fewer than 7,310 corgis, and she can remember all their names.

The Queen's nickname for Prince Philip is "Roger".

The Queen has never eaten a prune in her life.

The Queen owns the 78th largest stamp collection in the world.

The Queen's shoe size is 3½.

The Queen's favourite "Carry On" film is "Carry On Up The Khyber".

The Queen's favourite dish is spaghetti bolognese.

The Queen is distantly related by marriage to the late comedian Spike Milligan.

The Queen can complete the Daily Telegraph Quick Crossword in less than two hours.

The Queen has her own personal dustman.

The Queen's mobile phone has the ring tone "God Save The Queen"; a birthday present from her grandson Prince Harry.

The Queen owns the world's largest emerald, the "Star of Balti", given to her great-grandmother Queen Victoria by the Akond of Swatch.

The Queen and Prince Philip are ardent DIY enthusiasts, and once decorated the spare bedroom at Sandringham during a weekend in 1961.

The Queen owns a pet tortoise, believed to be 264 years old, which she calls "the Duke of Windsor" after her uncle.

When the Queen was introduced to singer Engelbert Humperdinck at a command performance in 1974, she mistook him for the actor Sir Laurence Olivier.

The Queen's favourite TV programme is The Sweeney, which she never misses.

During the Second World War the Queen smoked a pipe when she was in the ATS.

When she was only four years old, the Queen had violin lessons from Sir Edward Elgar, the well-known composer.

The Queen is an Arsenal season ticket holder.

Of the 28 prime ministers who have served under her, her favourite was Stanley Baldwin.

The Queen has visited Australia 97 times, but has never been to the Pacific islands of Satnav and Vanunu, even though she is their Head of State.

The Queen's favourite flower is the hydrangea.

The Queen is allergic to pepper.

The Queen has used 23,481 separate pairs of scissors to cut over 900,000 miles of ribbon at opening ceremonies.

The Queen has a lifetime subscription to the New Scientist magazine.

The Queen is a gifted mimic and can do all the characters from the popular TV series Little Britain.

The Queen took up pole-dancing when she was living in Malta in the early days of her marriage

The Queen once took a ride on the London Underground between Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus.

The Queen's Coronation Coach cannot go backwards.

The Queen once caught a salmon weighing 2.8 tonnes.

The Queen never allows the name "Peregrine Worsthorne" to be mentioned in her presence. No one knows why.

According to a law of 1154, which has never been repealed, all stoats belong to the Queen and killing a stoat is still a capital offence. The last felon to be punished in this way was Peter Stoatherd, who was hung at Wapping in 1538.

The Queen's jodhpurs have been traditionally made for her in the Indian city of Jodhpur.

The Queen has recently become an avid devotee of reflexology which she believes cured her sciatica.

When the Queen was introduced to the famous writer Rudyard Kipling, she mistook him for Engelbert Humperdinck, the popular singer.

As Head of the Church of England, the Queen has the power to imprison any churchman up to the rank of Archbishop.

The Queen's favourite TV programme is "Dad's Army", and when she once met its star, Arthur Lowe, she mistook him for Rudyard Kipling.

The Queen's favourite dish is prunes, which she likes to eat with pepper.

The Queen's pet name for Prince Philip is "Engelbert".

The Queen has never been to a Premiership football match.

The Queen is allergic to tortoises amd will not allow one to be kept at any of her homes.

The one Commonwealth country the Queen has never visited is Australia.

The Royal Coach can only travel backwards.

The Queen has never been to the toilet.

(That's enough things you didn't know about the Queen. Ed.)

That All-Purpose Editorial In Full

God Bless You, Your Ma'amness!!

AT THIS historic moment in our island story, we should be thankful that in a changing world one figure has remained constant as a living symbol of dedication, service and loyalty. Her Majesty the Queen is the sole element that binds this nation together as one family... war and peace... memories of Coronation... Elizabethan Age... duty to Commonwealth... family troubles notwithstanding... steadfast as a rock... profound religious faith... beacon of hope... long may she reign... God bless you, Ma'am... handbag... hat... gracious wave... common touch... have you come far? ... what do you do? ... my husband and I... if not enough, take in piece I wrote on Silver Jubilee... should fill up page...

© *All newspapers*

Those All-Purpose Features In Brief

The Queen You Never See

by Lady Veronica Massivesnob, Mistress of the Antechamber 1957-62.

THE most remarkable thing about Her Majesty, which is only known to those of us who have been privileged to see her at close quarters, is her extraordinary dedication to her job.

Most people probably have a picture of the Queen lolling around in bed until half-past eleven, smoking and reading the Racing Post, until eventually she puts on a dressing gown and gets up to watch Countdown on the television.

The popular view of the Queen is of a lazy, good-time girl who spends her evenings partying in the West End with her jet set friends.

The truth, as I can exclusively reveal to readers of *Private Eye*, could not be more different. In fact, on most days, Her Majesty begins her appointments no later than *(cont. p. 94)*

The Queen: Her Secret Passion

by Royal Biographer Lady Antonia Holden, author of *The Prince Charles I Never Knew* and *The Queen I Never Met*

ONE OF the best-kept secrets about the engimatic woman who has occupied the throne of Great Britain for more than half a century, is that she has a very private passion for, of all things, horses.

Ever since she was a little girl, "Ellibet", as she was known to her family and close friends, has liked nothing better than to spend her time around horses – riding them, grooming them and even sneaking off to watch them racing at places such as Ascot.

Only royal experts such as myself, who have been given access to the Windsor archives, realise just what an important part the horse has played in the life of this extraordinary woman.

Yet perhaps an even more amazing Royal secret, I can reveal, is the passion Elizabeth the Second has for dogs, particularly the small breed known as the corgi. *(You're fired. Ed.)*

A ROYAL WEEK IN PICTURES

'IN A FEW YEARS IT WILL BE GONE,' WARNS CAMERON

by Our Environmental Staff **John Selwyn Porritt**

A VISIBLY shocked David Cameron stood yesterday in front of what he called "an appalling man-made catastrophe".

"If things go on like this," he told reporters, "there will soon be nothing left.

"You can see it shrinking before your very eyes. It's melting away at an alarming rate, and every day new bits of it are breaking off."

Blue Ice

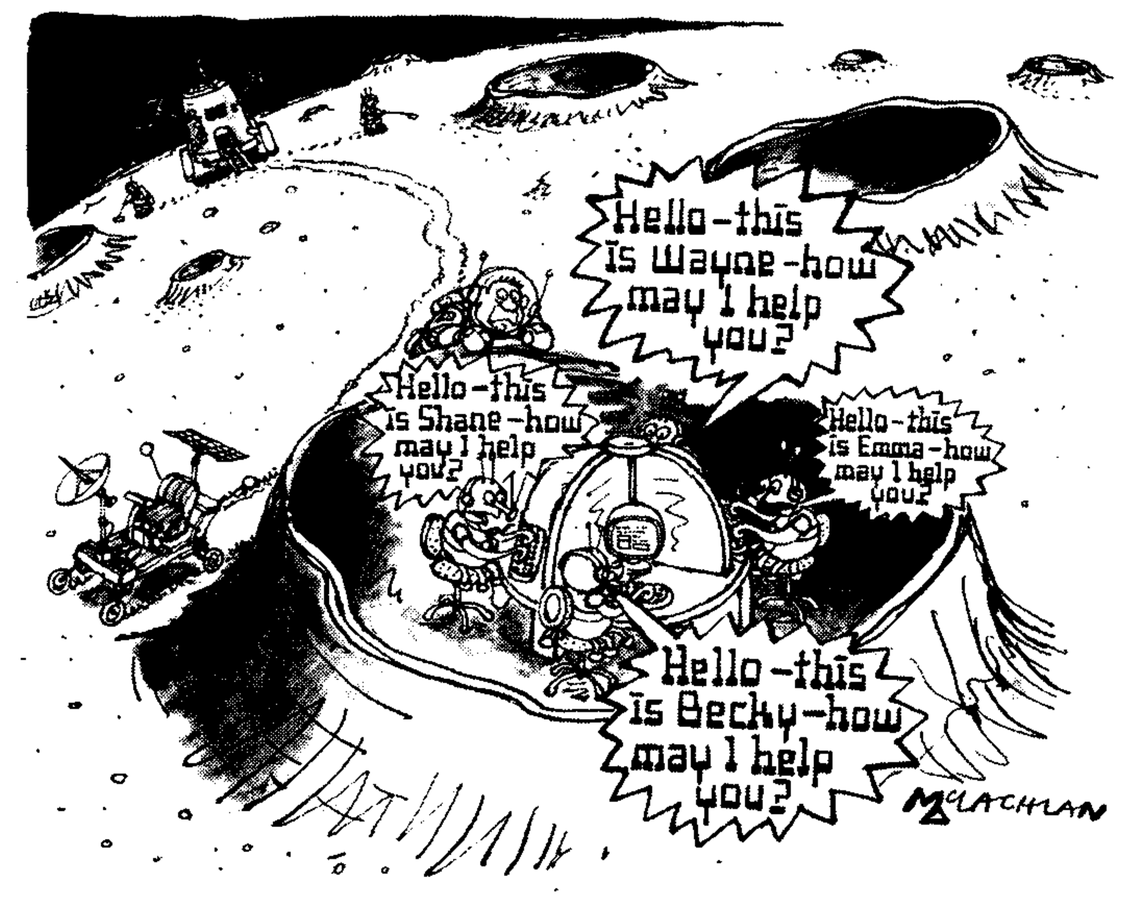
Mr Cameron was referring to the once great Conservative Party, "The Thatcher Icebergy" which once covered half the country, is expected to dwindle away virtually to nothing.

"We have to act in the forthcoming local elections before it's too late," he told his remaining supporters (Sir Sidney and Lady Doris Cameron-Bonkers).

I'm Alright Zac

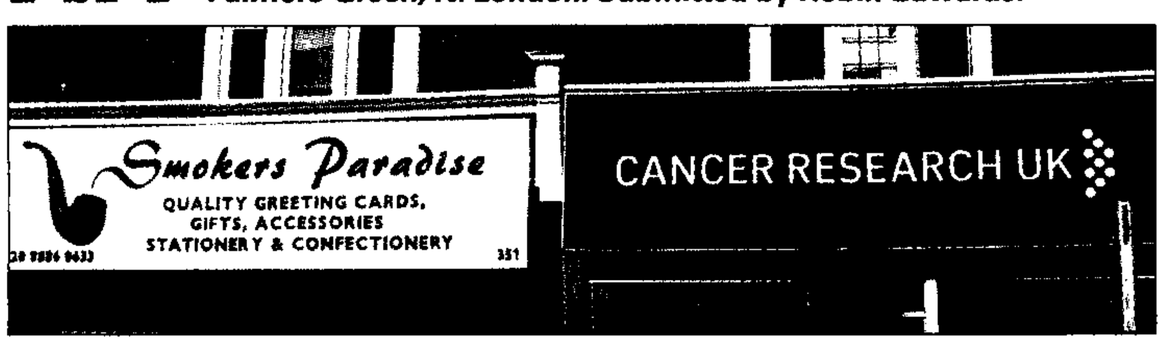
When asked what he proposed to do to save the Tory Party, Mr Cameron said, "Each individual must do what they can, whether it be not flushing the toilet, only boiling eggs for two minutes instead of four, or turning off the television whenever Mr Blair comes on."

INSIDE ● Vote Tory and get a free packet of Dr Liam Fox's Glacier Mints!

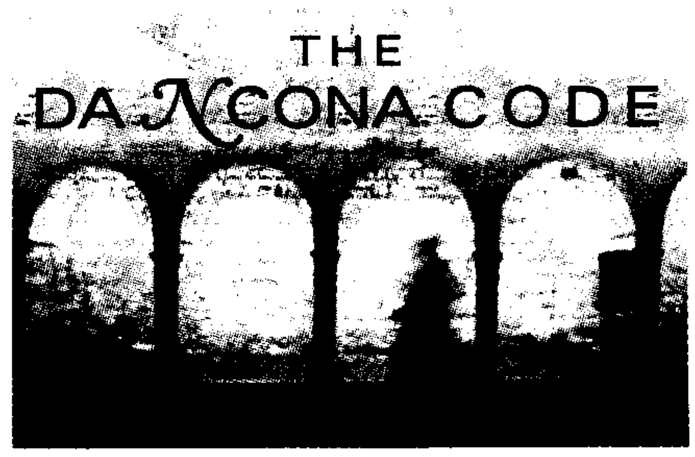

Hello-this is Wayne-how may I help you?
Hello-this is Shane-how may I help you?
Hello-this is Emma-how may I help you?
Hello-this is Becky-how may I help you?
McLACHLAN

I-SPY

Palmers Green, N. London. **Submitted by Robin Edwards.**



ADVERTISEMENT



THE world's oldest mystery is at last revealed!

How did Matthew D'Ancona become the editor of The Spectator?

Is he a member of the Secret Order of Knights of the Holy Brillo, which gives its members jobs because they take a vow of boredom?

What was the part played in this extraordinary story by Boris of Legovia and the mysterious Knights of Barclay, two brothers who lived in an impenetrable fortress on the tiny remote island of Brellu?

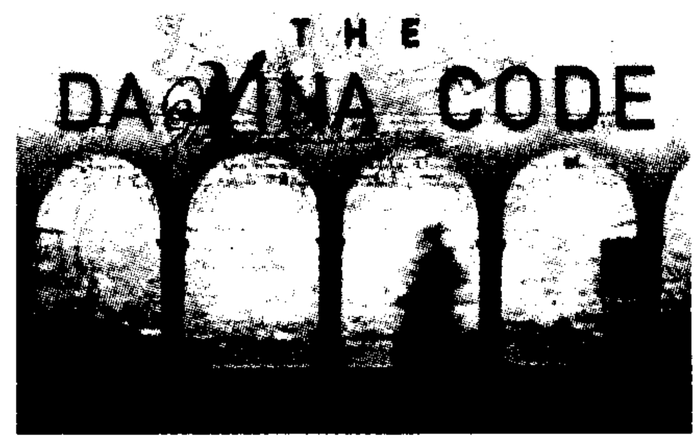
And was this the key to that other mystery which has baffled scholars for hundreds of years – how did the sinister Greek convict Taki Takalotofcokupthenos somehow hang onto his job?

What terrible secret did he know about D'Ancona?

Will anyone break the code?

Does anyone care?

ANOTHER ADVERTISEMENT



Deep within the labyrinthine portals of the BBC lurks a fanatical yet misguided sect – the Oplus Dei. They adhere to the precepts of regular mortification of the flesh – Wednesday nights at 8.00 – and finally unveil what is meant to be their ultimate masterpiece – the huge fiasco depicting 'The Last Chat-Show'. And it is their heretical belief that the dimly-shown seated presenter should actually be a woman.

Then, in true "why'vetheydunnit?" tradition, people start to disappear horribly, one by one million – the viewers.

(That's enough terrible books – Ed)

School news

St Cakes

Academy Term begins today. There are 2,316 young businessmen in the school and 3,412 young businesswomen. The Chief Executive of the school (formerly the headmaster) is Mr R.J. Kipling. The Head Boy is B.A.E. Consumer-Choice (Townley's). The Head Girl is H.S.B.C. Vocational-Training (Garrard's). The School Chapel has been converted to an electronic trading floor for the school's Stock Exchange, provided by Capita, and the former School Library is now an internet cafe, equipped by Accenture (although neither will be fully operational until 2012). Peerages will be handed out to all sponsors on St Cake's Day (Speaker: The Hon. Tony Blair MP). Sports Day will be replaced by a Corporate Golf Weekend (tickets £3,500 each from the Bursar, Major B.N.P. Griffin O.C.). Arrests will be held on 12 July, after which the school will be closed for an indefinite period.

DIARY

GERMAINE GREER ON THE QUEEN AT 80

"For crying out loud," I thought as I watched aghast, at the tender age of 14, as our new so-called Queen Elizabeth Windsor sped past me without a by-your-leave on her first visit to Australia in 1954, "the least you could do is stop and listen to what I have to bloody tell you."

Instead, cocooned in her snooty up-yours Rolls Royce – our Australian-built runarounds obviously not good enough for Lady Muck – Elizabeth Windsor just went on waving her plump little fingers at everyone else, diligently avoiding my gaze because she didn't have the sheer bloody guts to pick on someone her own size.

Her father, King George V, had died just two years before, after a long affair with Mrs Wally Simpson. The oh-so-innocent Elizabeth Windsor had immediately hot-footed it back from sunning herself in Africa when she heard the news, so as to grab the vacant throne for herself, rather than let her prettier little sister Princess Margaret-Rose bags it first.

She made it in the nick of time, leaving her little sister to stage her fifty-year hissy-fit, and she's been hogging that throne ever since. With her snout firmly in the trough, the new Queen's first thought was to find herself a husband to share the spoils with. She didn't have to look to far – looking out of the Palace windows one morning, who should she catch sight of but a handsome Greek backpacker in the street outside, giving her the come-on. Elizabeth Windsor was over the moon. She was never one for scruples and was happy to overlook the incontrovertible fact that Philip's family had died with the Fuhrer in the bunker, dutifully yelling Sieg Heil 'til the cows came home, or so it was said.

But, ever the little fixer, she had to give Philip a wash-and-brush up, didn't she, before introducing him to the Royal Family. First he had to lose that surname of his. Prince Philip Adolf-Hitler wouldn't look too good in the hoity-toity leather-bound wedding register, now would it? And with the help of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Alf Ramsay, she just had to get him to stop that habit of his of goose-stepping his way down the aisle.

Why the new Queen didn't marry an Aborigine is frankly beyond me and a kick in the teeth for her subject peoples. Thanks a bunch, ma'am. Taking an Aborigine male to her marriage bed would have presented a beacon of hope to all the oppressed people of the world, but did she do it? Did she heck. An Aborigine husband would have signalled that whatever her toffee-nosed advisers might tell her, dammit, she was on the side of the poor and the craply-treated. Not only that, no, but the young couple could have gone on a true Royal walkabout, living off grubs and nettles and tracing the songlines of the Home Counties for a period of seven years before returning barefoot to the so-called civilisation (don't make me laugh) that is commonly known as London Town. And, for chrissakes, why the hell couldn't they have bred a half-Aborigine Prince of Wales? It is a strange reflection that all Elizabeth Windsor's children – that's Charles, Andrew, Mike and Anne – look roughly the same. If she'd gone to the trouble of having one Chinese, say, and another Arab, and another Aboriginal, and another Indian then think what good she might have done for the world, with the minimum of effort. But don't talk to Lilibet about effort. Sorry, guys – it's a word that doesn't feature in her vocabulary.

So who the heck is the REAL Queen Elizabeth Windsor? A lot of people think that because she's commander-in-chief of the British armed forces, she's out there with her machine-gun and her stash of grenades, leading her troops into battle against her subject peoples on a day-to-day basis. Not so. Aged 80 years old, she hasn't so much as raised a fist and given an assailant a bloody nose or kicked an opponent in the balls with her dainty size four feet for quite a few years now.

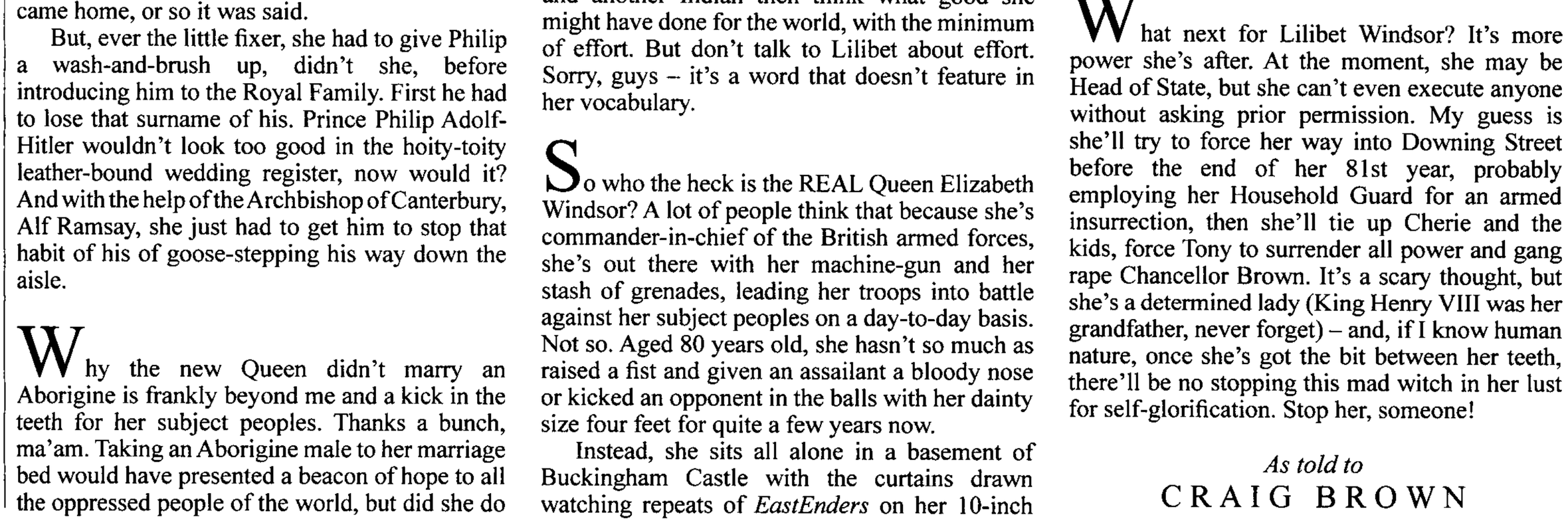
Instead, she sits all alone in a basement of Buckingham Castle with the curtains drawn watching repeats of *EastEnders* on her 10-inch black-and-white television while scooping tinned spaghetti hoops into her mouth with her gloved hands. She could watch absolutely anything she chose – she's even got a remote-control, for crying out loud – including programmes about culture and politics, or me sweating blood trying to tell people what to think. But no, she does not choose. Instead she just sits there, watching whatever she wants. Just like my mother in her aged care facility. Y'know something, these old people truly make my blood boil. The Queen could have married my father, all those years ago, and if only she had, I would now be the Princess Royal. But she couldn't be arsed. Instead, we have to get by with a Princess Royal who couldn't care a fig about Shakespeare or Tracey Emin or the Rain Forests. What a selfish old Monarch she turned out to be.

What makes her tick? Simple. The woman craves sex and money and power – and, oh boy, she doesn't care who knows it. Have you seen the way she draws attention to herself by wearing that fuck-you multi-million dollar crown to state occasions? And how she demands a golden kick-ass horse-drawn carriage plus hunky escorts in uniform, just to nip down the grocer's?

It's not yet been proved that Queen Windsor had anything to do with the Great Train Robbery – though experts say she just happened to be having a walk-out with Ronnie Biggs at the time – but the fact remains that this indulgent grandmother has a whole lot of cash in used notes stashed away beneath the folds of those beautifully-trimmed blue-rinse coats of hers. It'd all make her auntie, Queen Victoria, choke on her Shredded Wheat.

What next for Lilibet Windsor? It's more power she's after. At the moment, she may be Head of State, but she can't even execute anyone without asking prior permission. My guess is she'll try to force her way into Downing Street before the end of her 81st year, probably employing her Household Guard for an armed insurrection, then she'll tie up Cherie and the kids, force Tony to surrender all power and gang rape Chancellor Brown. It's a scary thought, but she's a determined lady (King Henry VIII was her grandfather, never forget) – and, if I know human nature, once she's got the bit between her teeth, there'll be no stopping this mad witch in her lust for self-glorification. Stop her, someone!

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


OH NO... TROY'S BEEN DOING SOME D.I.Y. IN MY STUDY AGAIN...
WURLITZER
MAYBE HE WANTS TO PROVE HE'S NOT TOTALLY USELESS AROUND THE HOUSE, GARY.
HE'S INSISTED ON PUTTING UP THIS NEW SHELF FOR ME TO DISPLAY SOME OF MY AWARDS...
NICE OF HIM...
YEAH, BUT HE'S BODGED IT... THE SHELF ISN'T STABLE, IS IT? LOOK, IT MOVES FROM SIDE TO SIDE...
TOPPLE
OH YEAH. YOU BETTER TELL HIM.
TROY, THAT SHELF IN MY STUDY... IT ROCKS...
WHOAH! THANKS, DAD.

Literary Review

On the Makine

The Woman Who Waited

Andreï Makine

(Sceptre, £12.99)

ANDREI Makine's elegies for the victims of Soviet tyranny have won him international acclaim and a clutch of awards including the Prix Goncourt, the Prix Médicis and the Grand Prix RTL-Lire, and he's already been championed as a candidate for the only slightly less significant Nobel Prize for Literature.

All of which must make anyone picking up this, his ninth novel to appear on these shores, expectant of nothing less than a masterpiece. The reality is different.

Indeed, anyone unfamiliar with Makine's earlier books is bound to wonder what all the fuss was about.

For what he appears to have done in this slender volume is to rush out a Makinesque potboiler, almost a work of self-parody, in which typical elements of his oeuvre are thrown together in a vain attempt to recapture the prizewinning formula. These include a passionate but doomed affair which ends in separation; a spell in the snowbound wastes of the Russian hinterland; a naïve and awkward narrator, ostensibly researching the story of which he becomes the chief witness; a coarse man telling rude jokes to counterpoint the narrator's "sensitivity"; and a general sense of thwarted hopes and bittersweet regret.

And then there's the glamorous, mysterious, middle-aged woman of the title. Her name is Vera and what she has been waiting for is the promised return of her lover, last seen as a young soldier 30 years earlier, marching off to battle in the dying days of World War Two. Amid the romanticised bleakness of her remote village, Vera is an object of both curiosity and admiration. That she has been waiting in vain is a foregone conclusion, but the nobility of her sacrifice is somewhat dented when it transpires that her lover, this ghost of a victim of the battlefield, is not only alive and well but has a job, home, family and even grandchildren elsewhere.

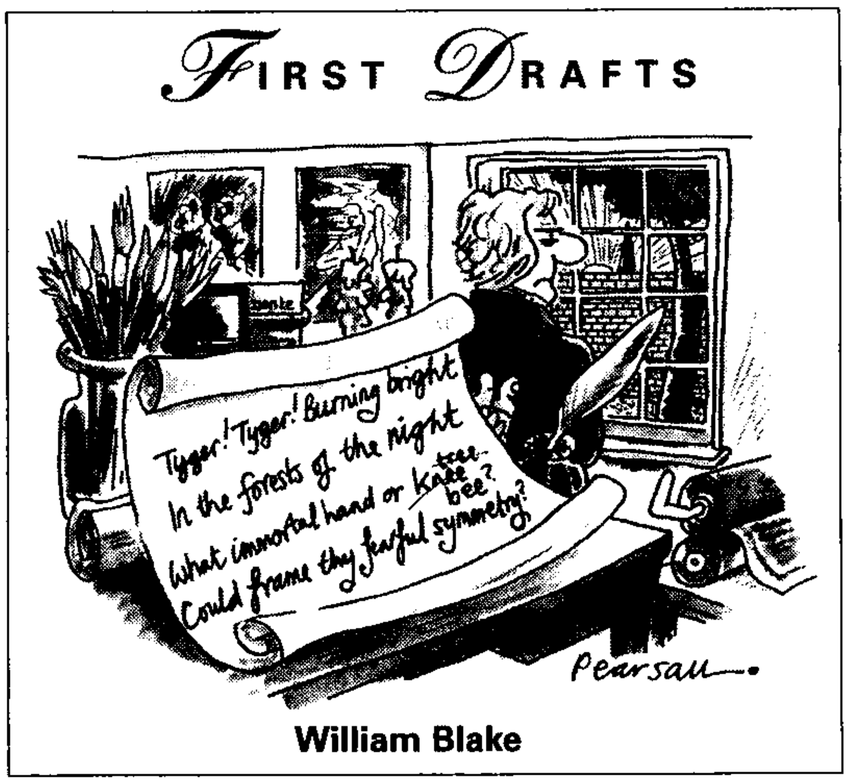
Her reaction to his gross perfidy (his name, by the way, is Boris) is finally to give in to the much younger narrator's advances and after a brief, intense, doomed etc, night of passion to wave him calmly on his way back to the railway station.

And that, pretty much, is that. Obviously one can read more into it. If Vera embodies all the heroic resignation or dumb stoicism (take your pick) of the honest Russian people patiently awaiting that Marxist paradise which never materialises, then Boris probably stands for all those self-serving apparatchiks who did well out of the Soviet system and are now busy lining their pockets with the spoils of its dissolution.

The unnamed narrator may represent the writer himself, or the culpably unengaged west, or he may be simply a device, a lens through which to see the story. At any rate, he takes his "research" seriously enough to stalk Vera and spy on her in the bath house (fantasising rather one-handedly the while), which contrasts nicely with his cynical dismissal of western-style bohemian orgies back in Leningrad. His eagerness to bed Vera evaporates as quickly as hers to resist him, once it becomes clear she is not after all a tragic damsel nobly awaiting a hero's return, but rather a dupe whose sole achievement is a monumental act of futility.

Critics have lavished superlatives on Makine's prose style, citing his "lyrical intensity", his "eloquent understatement", his "spare poetic elegance". What this seems to amount to in practice is a heavy handed over-use of the ellipsis, that three-pointed fadeout by which, on almost every page, he ends (or fails to end) his. . . It will drive you, ahem, quite dotty. Another trick is to keep jumping back and forth in time, but this means he sometimes forgets where he is, so that although the novel is set in the mid 1970s he repeatedly has his characters refer back to the 60s and 70s as a long-gone era.

One reason Makine has had such a good press is that he gives, in his life, such picturesque copy. He was born in Siberia and brought up in an orphanage in Stalingrad. He emigrated, or better still "defected", to France in the era of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. As a struggling writer he slept rough in a Parisian cemetery and now inhabits a garret in a former lunatic asylum. He writes in French but his early attempts to get published met with little success until he started pretending his work was actually translated from Russian. (When one publisher insisted on seeing the original, Makine had to fake his own version.) The ruse paid off and now Makine is in a position to dictate his own terms. While some of his earlier work may deserve the praise, this one certainly doesn't. Fans will be disappointed; new readers should start elsewhere.



William Blake

Books & Bookmen

■ AS predicted in Eye 1154 (although it was always a question of when, not if), Tim Waterstone has made a £280m bid for the chain that carries his name.

The offer is conditional on the Ottakar's deal not going through, despite the provisional nod from the Competition Commission, and brings with it displaced Penguin boss Anthony Forbes-Watson as honcho-in-chief.

Forbes-Watson, with some good sense, says that Waterstone's needs to get back on track before trying to take on anything else. The bid is much better than the £180m that Tiger Tim offered back in 2001, but will it be enough to make HMV sell the chain? Probably not while Alan Giles is working out his notice, having said that he'd sell to Tim "over his dead body" last time the cash was on the table. In which case, should Waterstone make an irresistible offer to Ottakar's and really spike Giles' guns?

■ AS REPORTED in the last *Eye*, Gordon Brown joins the ranks of Bloomsbury authors this autumn with the publication of his epic masterpiece, *Selected Speeches, 1997-2006*.

What everyone at Bloomsbury seems to have forgotten, however, is that he still owes them a rather more alluring book. Four years ago Bloomsbury paid Brown an advance (which he gave to charity) for *Courage*, a series of essays about the chancellor's heroes – including the anti-Nazi priest Dietrich Bonhoffer, the Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and Todd Beamer, the have-a-go passenger aboard one of the 9/11 flights.

Publication was scheduled for May 2003, but then had to be put back to September as Gordon hadn't actually delivered the manuscript. Come September, a Bloomsbury press officer told the *FT*: "It has been taken off the schedule. I'm not sure why."

Even then, however, a Treasury spokesman was insisting that "the book is on track and will be worth the wait".

That was in September 2003. The world – and Bloomsbury – are still waiting.

■ *GRAUNIAD* ombsudman Ian Mayes has at last pronounced on the great "Sam Bourne" affair.

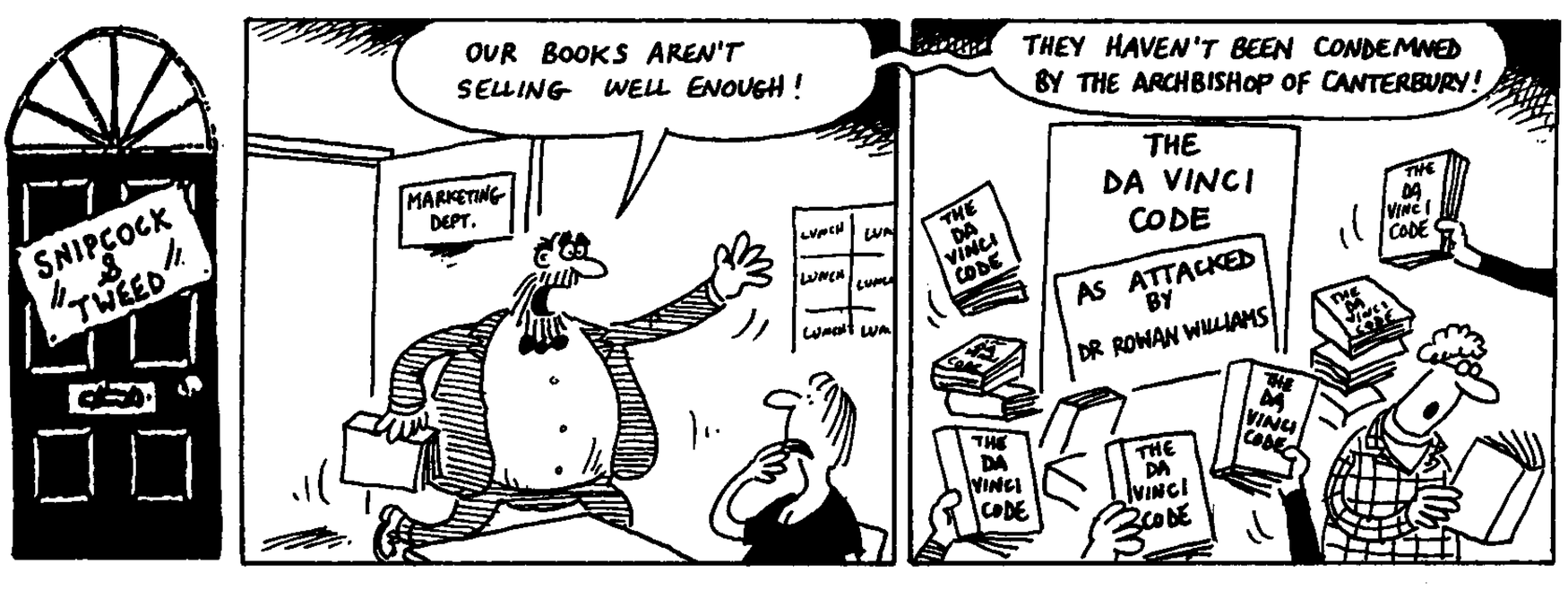
As *Eye* readers will recall, Michael Dibdin wrote a scathing review for the paper of the new thriller by "Bourne" – which happens to be the pseudonym of *Grauniad* bigwig Jonathan Freedland. Understandably anxious, the literary editor consulted editor Alan Rusbridger, who then asked Freedland for his view. Freedland advised – surprise! – that the review be killed, and so it was.

In his weekly column, after some throat-clearing and harrumphing, Mayes confirms that the *Eye*'s account was correct: Dibdin's review was spiked after Rusbridger consulted Freedland. Apparently Freedland now feels it would "probably have been wise" to print it. "Anyway," he tells Mayes, "the book is out there now and has received at least a couple of good reviews to balance his."

Has it? Here are some recent verdicts: "too often the clues and doctrine get in the way, but without them it would just be another thriller" (*Daily Mirror*); "a readymix thriller... bland" (*Evening Standard*); "quite incredible – in the true sense of the word – tosh" (*The Advertiser*, Adelaide). Only one review even half-matches Freedland's description. While noting that the book is "somewhat opportunistic... certainly no literary masterpiece... often slow to reach some startlingly obvious conclusions", the *Daily Express* does at least allow that it "bears all the hallmarks of the blockbuster".

Not much of a line to splash across the paperback, but better than nothing.

■ IDIOCY of the modern publisher, Pt94... The fine old firm of Secker & Warburg – now an imprint in the


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
OUR BOOKS AREN'T SELLING WELL ENOUGH!
MARKETING DEPT.
THEY HAVEN'T BEEN CONDEMNED BY THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY!
THE DA VINCI CODE
AS ATTACKED BY DR ROWAN WILLIAMS

mighty combine that is Random House – has been publishing George Orwell's books since 1938 when Orwell, who had quarrelled with his former sponsor Victor Gollancz over the latter's pro-Communist view of the Spanish Civil War, took Fredric Warburg the manuscript of Homage to Catalonia.

Eight years ago, in tribute to this long association – a hugely profitable one, it should be pointed out – Secker sponsored Professor Peter Davison's 21-volume George Orwell: The Complete Works, an extraordinary labour of editorial love acclaimed on all sides as a triumph of modern publishing.

Surely, then, the news that Prof Davison, having turned up a large quantity of hitherto unpublished letters, was preparing a supplement entitled The Lost Orwell would have had Secker falling over itself to usher it into the bookshops? Well no, as it happens. Despite the fact that Davison does his own typesetting and takes virtually no editorial fee; despite, too, the fact that anything with Orwell's name on it is guaranteed press coverage and decent sales, Random House turned the book down on the less than plausible grounds that it would be uneconomic to print.

Happily The Lost Orwell, described as "a treasure trove of new material", has been picked up by a small independent, the Timewell Press, and will appear next month. Cue huge embarrassment in the Vauxhall Bridge Road bunker.

■ ANTIQUARIAN booksellers have removed hundreds of thousands of books from the website abebooks.com in protest at new contracts (see Eye 1155).

An April Fool's Day protest saw 185,000 books removed by 41 members of the Antiquarian Booksellers Association in the UK, while members of the US association removed 800,000. Many booksellers plan to continue their boycott over the huge mandatory credit card processing fee of 5.5 percent (on top of the site's 8 percent commission), while others are offering books on ABE only at a highly inflated prices compared to that in their shops.

Professional booksellers are also unhappy at the site being opened up to private sellers, which they say puts collectors at far greater risk of being ripped off.

'Bookworm'

LIBRARY NEWS

■ THE deteriorating state of Britain's public libraries was demonstrated once again by the emergency closure of the adult fiction section of Forest Hill library in south London last week, when the ceiling was found to be unsafe.

Decaying roof timbers were discovered after the plaster cracked, posing a serious health and safety risk to readers below. The library is likely to be shut for four months.

The library is next-door-but-one to the closed public swimming baths (*Eye* 1156). Opposition councillors have called for a complete audit of Lewisham council's buildings, noting that "you would expect a public authority to be on top of their building repairs and know when parts of them are coming to the end of their life."

Last year the select committee looking at public libraries heard that a survey in 1995 found a £650m backlog in library building repairs nationwide – and that the situation had only got worse since.

District and Circle

Seamus Heaney
(Faber, £12.99)

An Irish Poet Foresees His Destiny

For Padraig O'Hoolihan

And I remember auld Padraig, at Mrs McGilliginty's bar,
In Ballyshamrock, after the hooley,
Kissing the rim of the sweet glass outstretched before him,
nectar-nurtured, peat-proud,
That Cathal Macliammoir grandly poured him, that time, when history
hung like
A shroud over our young lives, Padraig, Cathal and I. It was
An older world then, it was *so*, rime rising on the frozen branch, Sergeant
O'Flaherty prowling the darkened lane, rain out of Galway,
Sligo, Ballybunnion, the broths of Mrs McGarrigle's fond devising,
Wherein floated turnip, swede and onion.
(Already the rhyme came hot and quivering, like no other
Troubles, *unam sanctam catholicam*, my Irish mother.)

The road taken
To bypass Ballygodforsaken
Took me East
And if I'm not mistaken
Wasn't it Yeats and Hughes who
Summoned me to the feast?

Auld Padraig knew. He of the osprey eye, the broken dustbin
lid used as a shoe-tree, the donkey cart
That plied from Lough Dern, the shinty played with Paddy
McGinty, "You'll maybe write a poem" he once apostrophised
Himself. I did.

Not the brown and green flannel that lay on the bare basin
Next my bed would I recall but the breath from Macliammoir's bald
Head in the dark of the square. Father O' Driscoll and Mrs Abernethy, I
Believe they were there. Sure, 'tis a vision, the green land, its watery curtain,
lake-garnished, tor-strewn,
But fortunes – Padraig was certain – are won elsewhere.
So I said farewell to Hibernia's daughters – sweet Erin, fair Finula –
Set off to
Start coining it over the water.

Pseuds Corner

Initially, however, it was not politics but the men's wives who brought them together. "Gwyneth and Samantha were at the same yoga class," Martin explained, "and Samantha wanted to know where she could source some Fairtrade essential oils."

Soon the women were meeting to practise Kegel exercises in the Camerons' Notting Hill home. Martin arrived one afternoon to collect Gwyneth on his trike, spotted the wind turbine, and the Coldplay-Cameron alliance was born.

The background to the David Cameron/ Chris Martin friendship, *Guardian*

There is a wise part of me that hands myself a novel as a mother hands an excitable child a jigsaw.

TALITHA STEVENSON, 'My Week', *Observer*

We distinguish ourselves from what we perceive as the nouveau riche – millionaires from ex-Communist states, footballers' wives, the famous-for-being-famous reality-TV types. Where there are hungry for established labels to assert their newly found status, NPCs have a set of values that, I would argue, combine a rock 'n' roll attitude with bohemian creativity, openness to diversity, ethical consumption and socio-political consciousness. This new kind of luxury is not really about the money, even though items do come at a price, not least because they are not mass-produced. It is about sharing the passion and belief of those who came up with the ideas in the first place. We are prepared to pay for what the French call coup de coeur and what may translate as "labour of love."

DR LISA HUJIC, 'Insight consultant at New Solutions strategic innovation agency' on the New Premium Consumers, *Guardian*

The first time I saw the Rietveld Schroder House I keeled over and broke an ankle in excitement.

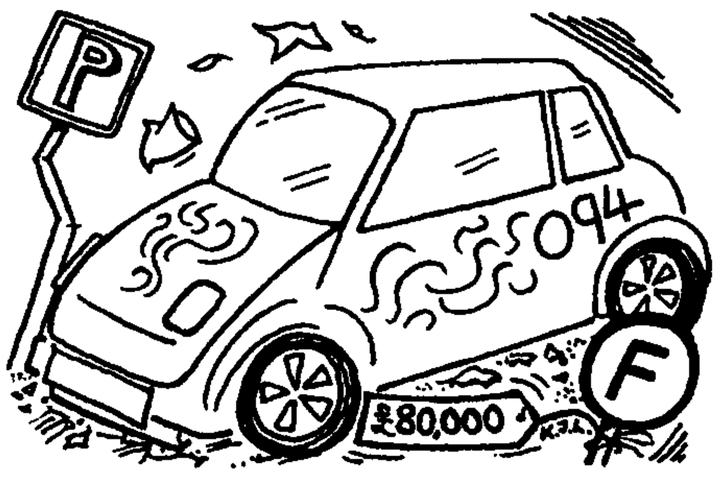
FIONA MacCARTHY, *Guardian*

My favourite memory was my English tutor Dr Francis Warner asking his English group what play we were going to put on for OUDS [Oxford University Dramatic Society]: he made us feel very pathetic when we did not know. He then told us to wait a minute and disappeared to his inner study, coming back a few minutes later having made a telephone call. He announced that Sam would send a play. Samuel Beckett usually did, and we put on a world premier of "Lessness" at the Oxford Theatre.

Tatler editor GEORDIE GREIG interviewed by the St Peter's College Oxford alumni magazine

It was intensely rendered, sit-up-straight food but technique was never to the fore; rather it thrummed subliminally in the simplicity and confidence of the combinations.

ALLAN BROWN visits Restaurant Martin Wishart, *Sunday Times*



A truly wonderful and very well proportioned single parking space offering a sought-after location with a very hard base, superior tarmac-mix and easy access onto and off via the space surrounding it. The space comprises approximately 60% asphalt, 20% concrete and 20% local stone providing a high quality and very hard layer to park your car. £80k

From the Foxton's web-site

CONTRIBUTORS: John Simmons, Matthew Barr, Neil Wellard, Emma Frith, Lord Gnome, Mike Aylmer, Soho String Quartet

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

MISCARRIAGE

A proper Charlie

BEING jailed for a crime you did not commit is beyond the imagination of most of us; and those who do emerge after years of wrongful imprisonment are often irreparably damaged, physically and mentally.

So it is no surprise there has been such uproar at Home Secretary Charles Clarke's (pictured left) latest pronouncement: to knock £5m off the £8m a year compensation paid to those who are wrongly convicted. He wants to abolish compensation altogether for those who are cleared on a first appeal that is brought in time, and he wants to impose a £500,000 cap for those who have to fight harder and stay in jail longer before they are able to prove their innocence. This cap would even apply to people like John Kamara, who rotted behind bars for more than 20 years before he was declared innocent of murder.

The fact that police officers often land innocents in jail in the first place, and that the legal system and indeed the Home Office then prolong their wrongful incarceration at a cost of millions, far exceeding any of the savings he says he will make, does not appear to have occurred to Clarke.

Lawyers are also now uncertain whether such notorious miscarriages of justice as that of the Cardiff Three, Yusef Abdullahi, Stephen Miller and Tony Paris, who served four years after being wrongly convicted of the horrific murder of Lynette White in 1988, would automatically qualify for compensation because their appeals were largely lodged on time and did not initially concern new evidence. Their convictions were quashed in December 1992, triggering an inquiry which so far has resulted in the arrest of 19 police officers and 13 witnesses on suspicion of offences including perjury and perverting the course of justice. In July 2003 the real perpetrator, Jeffrey Gafoor, was finally jailed for the murder.

Another who would be excluded from compensation under Clarke's proposals is Annette Hewins, whose 11-year battle to clear her name of involvement in an arson attack, which killed a mother and two children, was reported in the last *Eye*. Mrs Hewins was accused of buying and supplying the petrol that was used to set fire to the house in which Diane Jones and her children lived. She suffered appalling abuse in jail for being a "child killer".

The appeal court quashed her conviction for arson with intent to endanger life in 1999 saying "there was not sufficient evidence against her". But, using his discretion over compensation awards – where, for example, there is no obvious wrongdoing by police – the then Home Secretary Jack Straw refused any payment on the grounds that she had not been fully exonerated.

Mrs Hewins decided to clear her name by suing South Wales Police. This resulted in last month's police apology and a public declaration that she had had no involvement in the events of 11 October 1995. So now fully cleared she does qualify for compensation… though under Clarke's proposal she would not.

What her case illustrates is that, if the Home Secretary persists with his crazy proposals, the innocent will launch a mass of costly civil actions against the police or anyone else they hold responsible for their plight. They will also challenge his highly controversial intention to destroy the "innocent until proven guilty" cornerstone of the criminal justice system and replace it with the much-criticised "not proven" verdict used in Scotland.

The case against Annette Hewins was always so weak and the case against the Cardiff Three always so tainted, that neither should have gone to trial in the first place. Had the flaws in just those two cases been properly exposed at the time, the saving to taxpayers would have dwarfed those that Clarke hopes to save.

NIGER URANIUM

Quote, misquote

THE British government tried to persuade US Secretary of State Colin Powell to include the claim that Saddam was pursuing uranium from Niger in his high profile pre-war address to the United Nations on Iraq's supposed WMDs, according to newly released US documents.

The United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency later stated that the Niger-Iraq claims were based on crudely faked documents. Powell, on the advice of the CIA and following a memo to him from the INR, the US State Department's intelligence analysts, rejected the UK claims and didn't put them in his speech.

The speech Powell did make to the UN on 5 February 2003 included photos and recordings allegedly showing Saddam's secret weapons and was central to the pitch for war. The fact that all his "evidence" has turned out to be false is a great embarrassment to Powell; but avoiding the dubious British tip has saved him at least one blush.

President George Bush, however, was more gullible and *did* include the claims in his State of the Union speech before the invasion.

Since the embarrassing revelation that the uranium-from-Niger claim was so much phooey based on badly made forgeries, the British and American governments have tried to synchronise their stories over the WMD debacle – but only by being highly selective in what they quote from official papers.

The British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, for example, responded to the criticism of MPs on the foreign affairs committee about the Blair WMD dossier's Niger claims by telling the MPs: "In October 2002 a US National Intelligence Estimate was drawn up supporting our view that Iraq had sought to acquire yellow cake from Africa."

In America, meanwhile, the Niger story has become an ongoing scandal because White House officials began leaking against critics of the tale in an attempt to deal with the debacle. Papers from a court case involving US government official and chief leaker "Scooter" Libby say that President Bush and Dick Cheney ordered him, Libby, to make public the same parts of the then secret "National Intelligence Estimate" which Straw had come to rely on.

But both leakers and quoters were highly selective in which bit of the Estimate they drew from. The Niger claims were excluded from the document's "Key Judgements" because the Estimate also included vigorous dissent from the INR. The Estimate added: "The claims of Iraqi pursuit of natural uranium in Africa are, in INR's assessment, highly dubious." But not dubious enough for Bush or Blair.

* If the *Eye*'s Niger contact would like to make contact again, it would be appreciated.

NHS

The IT hits the fan

EIGHT years ago, surveying a history of failed health service IT initiatives, Labour MP Maria Eagle asked the then NHS chief whether somebody who repeatedly walked into the same brick wall might be thought "drunk or of unsound mind". Now, three years into the national IT programme – sexily rebranded Connecting for Health (CfH) – the NHS is once again drunkenly or insanely heading for the wall. But this time, in true New Labour style, the bill will run into many billions.

When Accenture, the monopoly "local service provider" for the east and north-east of England under contracts worth £2bn, recently announced that it was losing money on the project, it immediately blamed its software provider, iSoft. But the man in charge of CfH, Richard Granger, was having none of that: he called for heads to roll at Accenture and pointed out that the company running the programme for the North West and West Midlands, Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC), was doing very nicely with the same iSoft software.

Records seen by *Private Eye*, however, show that the man who prides himself on plain-speaking is exaggerating the progress made by CSC. Of the approximately 30 acute hospitals that should be using CSC's systems by now, only six are doing so – and they only have the most basic administration systems up and running and are already years behind the plan for computerising their clinical testing and prescribing services. Similarly, while the majority of primary care trusts in the area can claim to be running CSC systems, none has installed any of the clinical systems that should have been live by now.

CSC and Accenture aren't the only ones with problems. Last year the local service provider for the south of England, Fujitsu, sacked its software provider IDX after failing to deliver any systems to its designated hospitals. In came another US provider, Cerner; and when the new team got some basic software running in one hospital in December Fujitsu confidently forecast another six by Easter and a further 11 by July.

The first of these dates has been and gone, however, with no resurrection in Fujitsu's performance. No further Cerner systems have been installed, while the one that prompted the optimism, at the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre (in IT terms a relatively simple task compared to a full acute hospital), has wrought havoc. Last month the centre's chief executive had to write to patients to apologise for delays to their operations caused by the system's "inability to print patient invitation letters and incorrect schedules for patients who need to be seen by particular dates". The hospital was even forced to report a "serious untoward incident" to the patient safety agency.

More worryingly still, despite being unable to perform on its existing contracts, the Department of Health is known to be planning to run Cerner systems in hospitals in other parts of the country too, with London and the Wirral top of the list.

The delays and fiascos already emerging from CfH contrast sharply with the prognosis offered by ministers and officials. The head of the prime minister's delivery unit, Ian Watmore, earlier this month declared CfH a success – but coming from the former UK boss of Accenture, responsible for one of the greatest ever public sector IT cock-ups in the NIRS2 national insurance system (see *Eyes passim*), that's not saying much. The records show that by March this year CfH had in fact only provided basic administrative systems (often badly) to nine acute hospitals – against a target of delivering these *and* more complex clinical systems to 102 of them. Some might wonder just how pissed or mad you would have to be to call that a success.

DELOITTE

Far from Fabb

THE BCCI creditors who will have to pay £120m for Deloitte's hopeless legal action against the Bank of England aren't the only ones questioning in whose interests the firm really acts when brought in as liquidator or administrator of a struggling business. Some very disgruntled businessmen and workers in the West Midlands steel industry are none too pleased with the beancounters either.

The administration of a company is among the most sensitive jobs an accountant can be given. Businesses can be shut down, assets sold and jobs slashed – a process that stretches out for months or years and earns far more for the administrators than quietly getting a company back on its feet and moving on. Recognising this, the insolvency industry's code of ethics demands that "renewal, rescue, recovery" is put above generating fees.

One firm that hoped to benefit from this standard, but is instead on its knees, is a group of steel companies run by Worcestershire businessman David Fabb.

Nearly three years ago Deloitte was called in by his company's principal bank to check that its loans were secure. To the directors' astonishment, the accountants produced a report that showed the group to be insolvent, without giving the company a chance to repudiate their findings and even though the company's assets hugely exceeded its liabilities. Meanwhile Deloitte's lawyers, DLA Piper Rudnick, claimed to other group bankers that the company was going into administration when in fact no such decision had been taken. This misrepresentation ensured that all financial support evaporated – at which point the company was presented with the Hobson's choice of accepting Deloitte as administrators or face immediate, and terminal, receivership.

From that point on things went from bad to worse for Fabb's companies. Tens of millions of pounds worth of land was sold on terms that appeared to ignore imminent changes in planning consents (now set to multiply the values by allowing for houses and supermarkets to be built) – much to the delight of some lucky developers but of little consolation to the company's creditors.

The administration continues even though its main purpose – the sale of the assets – was completed two years ago. But the process is being extended by legal action brought by Deloitte against another Fabb company that was kept out of the administration, racking up more fees for... Deloitte! The latest wrangle involves a claim that assets owned by the company, CKE Engineering, belong to the businesses under Deloitte's control, despite evidence that Deloitte knew this not to be the case. When CKE was itself placed in administration and Fabb offered personally to buy the assets and so rescue the firm, the sale could not go ahead because of Deloitte's claim on the assets. Thus stymied, CKE has now shut down with the loss of 100 jobs; and another hole is punched in Britain's manufacturing industry.

This trail of devastation has so far earned Deloitte and its half a million-a-year partners £3.2m in fees, demonstrating just why accountants might be so keen to get companies into administration in the first place. The saga certainly shows why the same firm that acts for a company's bankers, as Deloitte had here, should not then be allowed to become the one that does very nicely out of any subsequent administration – an arrangement that the *FT* once described as "like putting Herod in charge of Mothercare".

CANCER DRUGS

Not so Nice

FATHER-of-two David Hitchen, 54, has been forced to go cap in hand to family and friends to raise £17,000 in order to prolong his life.

Mr Hitchen was diagnosed in March with glioblastoma, an aggressive brain tumour. It is incurable but Mr Hitchen's best chances for longer survival is radiotherapy combined with a new chemotherapy drug called Temozolomide, now used widely across Europe, the US and Australia and the first major advance in the treatment of this type of brain cancer in 25 years.

Thanks to a "deeply flawed" preliminary finding by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (Nice), however, it is not usually available on the NHS in the UK. Even though it is a licensed drug, Nice has decided it should not be used for the treatment of newly-diagnosed high grade glioma except in approved clinical studies. The decision has attracted unprecedented condemnation by the UK's neuro-oncology experts because the drug has already been proven in such a study to significantly extend the lives of many of those with the rare cancer. So far, it has more than doubled the number of patients who live beyond two years.

The trouble is that Temozolomide does not work for everyone so Nice has so far ruled it out for all, pending more research. Thus British cancer patients cannot benefit from a drug that was invented in the UK as a result of funding from Cancer Research UK.

Thirty-six consultant neuro-oncologists, including Joanne Lewis, who is treating Mr Hitchen at the Northern Centre for Oncology in Newcastle, have written to Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt, urging her to intervene immediately. They accuse Nice, which does not have a single cancer clinician, neurologist or neurosurgeon on its interim committee, of ignoring its own neuro-oncology advisers. Nice is also accused of making a number of crucial mistakes in its appraisal of Temozolomide thanks to shoddy analysis of the available research and flawed assumptions about the current management of patients with brain tumours.

But for the generosity of his family and friends, Mr Hitchen would be denied extra years of life. "I cannot tell you the indignity of having to ask," he says. "I was a fitness trainer and therapist. I have worked and paid tax and national insurance all my life and I have never until now needed to call on the NHS. When I did, it turned its back on me. I can't tell you how that makes me feel. But I guess I am lucky that I have such generous friends and family and thanks to them I am going to make the most of this."

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **GREEDY BASTARDS:** A year ago the City law firm Charles Russell was so incensed at suggestions on BBC 2's *Newsnight* that it was making a packet from running the £67.5m trust fund set up to compensate families who saw their loved ones succumb to variant Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (vCJD), it lodged a detailed and costly complaint to Ofcom.

The firm would have done better spending the time and energy finalising payments to some of the families who, more than three years down the line, are still seeking compensation for items such as nursing care and transport costs. For last week Ofcom rejected every one of the lawyers' complaints about "unfair treatment" by the BBC.

While families have been struggling to claim a mere £3.91 an hour for providing care, senior partner Richard Vallence at Charles Russell charges the trust nearly £300 an hour. Over the three years it has been administering the scheme, the law firm has paid £16.7m to 158 victims and £5.3m in costs – £3.2m of which was paid to itself. In other words for every £10 to the victim's family, £2 went to Charles Russell.

It now seems the legal costs percentage has even gone up. That is because the fund consists of two types of payment: automatic compensation of around £125,000 to every victim or family; and the discretionary payments for financial hardship, for things such as nursing care. It is the discretionary payments that are now the main source of complaints about delay, unnecessary complexity and spiralling legal costs. Last year Charles Russell paid itself £800,000, mainly for work on discretionary payments which totalled a mere £74,000. If half that bill was for discretionary payments then for every £1 per family, £5-plus went to Charles Russell. If it is two-thirds of the bill, then for every £1 per family, Charles Russell took more than £7!

No wonder people like Annie McVey, who saw her daughter Clare die a horrible death aged just 15 are so furious. *Eye* readers may recall that she gave up her job as a nurse to look after Clare and is still arguing with the trust over the costs of that care.

But at least Charles Russell has decided to foot the £20,000 bill for the failed Ofcom complaint itself. Until the *Eye* highlighted the fact, it was going to bill the trust!

■ **SUSAN MAY:** The plight of Susan May, who many believe was wrongfully convicted of murdering her aunt 13 years ago, goes from bad to worse.

Mrs May, who is out of jail on parole, is waiting to see if the Criminal Cases Review Commission sends her case back to the court of appeal.

Last December the *Eye* highlighted how she risked losing her home because of an unpaid legal bill of £2,800, run up while she was in prison. Now it emerges that she risks being returned to prison because one of the police officers involved in her 1992 conviction, Det Sergeant Janet Rimmer, has apparently complained to the probation service about "harassment" from 60-year-old Mrs May, saying she fears for her wellbeing now that Mrs May is free.

Greater Manchester Police demanded a meeting with probation officers to discuss Rimmer's concerns, which centre on the campaign by Mrs May and her supporters to clear her name.

One of Mrs May's claims is that DS Rimmer made up notes of a conversation she claimed to have had with Mrs May in a police station car park, after Mrs May had gone to give her fingerprints, supposing this was for elimination purposes.

DS Rimmer alleged that Mrs May asked her whether her fingerprints could be used to match scratches found on her aunt Hilda Marchbanks' face. Mrs May maintains she could not have asked this because she did not know about any scratches at the time.

Mrs May's new submissions to the CCRC include a report from a retired senior police officer detailing the shortcomings of Greater Manchester Police's original investigation and criticism of DS Rimmer's "note-taking" when Mrs May should have been interviewed as a suspect under the terms of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1983.

The harassment allegations from DS Rimmer have a history. As early as 1997, when Mrs May was still in prison, Rimmer claimed that some of her supporters had harassed her and her children. When the support group, which said the claims were unfounded, asked for details, they got no answer.

Mrs May, her supporters and solicitor have again asked for information to support the latest claims. Again there has been no response. They have now complained to the Independent Police Complaints Commission and to Greater Manchester Police.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

ABBEY National and its new Spanish owner, Banco Santander, face an unwelcome re-examination of the events leading up to the death of Abbey employee Richard Chang in July 2004. Earlier this month the Chang family filed an employment tribunal case against the bank claiming constructive dismissal, racial discrimination and human rights offences.

Richard Chang, a business analyst at Abbey Financial Markets, died after falling from the fifth floor of the atrium at Abbey's London headquarters 40 minutes after leaving a more than two-hour interrogation by investigators from Kroll Associates. Kroll had been hired to discover the authors of three anonymous letters sent to the Financial Services Authority and Abbey senior executives earlier that year. The letters made allegations of corruption and cronyism in the awarding of software contracts.

In July last year an inquest jury decided that Chang had committed suicide. The coroner stated that he was sending a report to ACAS suggesting the need for improved guidance to employers on the conduct of such internal investigations to prevent future fatalities.

Chang's widow, Lay Peng Lim, accused Abbey of deceiving her husband into attending the meeting with the Kroll investigators who, she said, had subjected her husband to hectoring and misleading questioning. Chang, who was leaving for a higher paid job with another bank, consistently denied he was the author of the letters.

Lay Peng began an employment tribunal case against Abbey in October 2004 but this was withdrawn after the inquest. It is not known whether Abbey made a financial settlement. Chang had two teenage children.

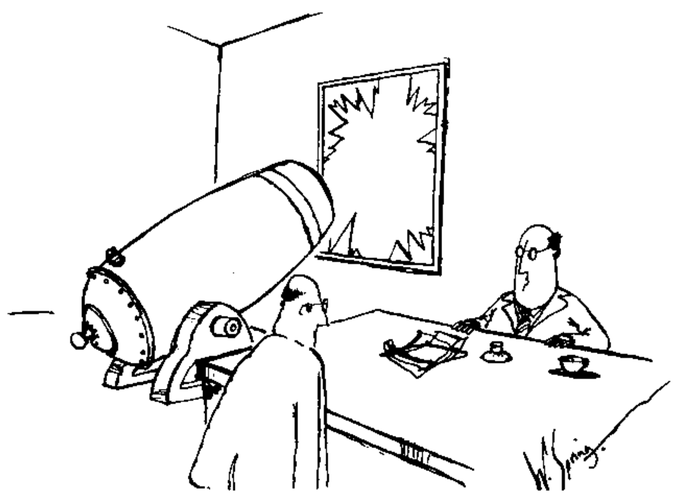
It is not clear whether Lay Peng is supporting the new case, which has been filed by Joseph Lee, Chang's brother-in-law and co-executor with Lay Peng. An earlier attempt by the Chang family – who do not accept the suicide verdict – to bring a constructive dismissal claim was attacked by Abbey as an abuse of process. The tribunal ruled that a new claim could be brought by Lee as executor on behalf of the Chang estate. Abbey is also expected to oppose the latest claim.

The Abbey and Kroll investigations are accused of being "racially motivated". The new claim raises the question of how many of the suspects – narrowed down from 40 to 8 – were white. Chang and his black line manager Vincent Santeng were the first and only employees to be interviewed. During the inquest Santeng accused the Kroll investigators of racism.

The coroner severely restricted the evidence given during the inquest so there was little discussion of what was in the anonymous letters and whether any of the allegations were true. Abbey insisted an internal investigation had proved the allegations were unfounded. The contents of the letters were not made public. Also not made public was a note found on the fifth floor in which Chang was said to have admitted involvement.

A full tribunal hearing is likely to explore the events surrounding the letters, the subsequent Abbey investigation and the Kroll interview, which led to Richard Chang's death. The allegations centred on the links between Abbey executives and consultants Buttonwood Tree.

Richard Chang's parents and sisters, who face the financial and legal muscle of Abbey in what the employment tribunal chairman described as an "unusual" case, are looking for support in fighting the case and can be contacted at valeriem01@aol.com. They hope a full employment tribunal hearing will answer the many questions remaining after his tragic death.



"I admit our redundancy package is harsh, Perkins, but I believe fair... More than fair in some cases!"

MORE on the close business links between jailed former solicitor Michael Fielding and generous Labour lender Sir David (but not now Lord) Garrard emerges from two civil cases in which Fielding featured.

The first involved litigation following the 1986 takeover of property group Land Investors by the Berger family interests and Garrard for £77m. Land Investors was acquired by BCPH which was owned 75:25 by the Berger family and Garrard. The Berger interests subsequently entered into an agreement to buy out Garrard for £41.25m.

However, they claimed that it then emerged that Garrard had a secret agreement with Fielding, who acted for the Berger family, to give him 20 percent of his stake in BCPH or a 5 percent interest. This was described in the statement of claim as a "bribe". The existence of the secret agreement was accepted by both Fielding and Garrard who were Land Investors directors.

The secret agreement became known as a result of a previous legal action brought by Frogmore Estates, which claimed it was supposed to be in on the Land Investors deal. Fielding and Garrard claimed that the settlement of that action prevented any subsequent claim by the Bergers. The Bergers sued in 1996 for the return of £8.25m received by Fielding who was also sued for more than £40m for breach of duty.

The Frogmore case settled just before it came to trial in 1992. Frogmore withdrew the allegations and paid £200,000 towards Garrard and Fielding's costs. Garrard also made a £350,000 costs payment to the Bergers. The appeal court ruled against the Berger claim in 1999.

The close connections between Fielding and Garrard continued at the latter's company Minerva where Fielding became a director. Fielding seemingly expected to benefit from Minerva's stock market flotation in 1996 which he hoped would resolve the pressing financial problems in part created by the Frogmore case.

These problems caused him to begin stealing from clients at law firm Lawrence Graham. When this was discovered in 2001 he fled to Florida. He returned last year and was jailed for eight years for stealing nearly £6m.

Prior to his return his bankers, Royal Bank of Scotland, who had made him bankrupt, sued Fielding's wife for more than £3m. In a 2003 ruling in favour of the bank, Mr Justice Hart – who had presided in the Berger case – declared: "Mr Fielding was under increasingly severe financial pressures (although until a very late stage continuing to believe that the owl of Minerva would eventually take wing)." Similar sentiments were expressed in mitigation during Fielding's trial last November.

THE unanswered question from the fiasco of the 256-day BCCI liquidators case for misfeasance/dishonesty against the Bank of England is why the trial judge Mr Justice Tomlinson felt unable to halt what he and none other than the then Lord Chief Justice Lord Woolf considered a "farce", a year before the case collapsed last November after the creditors pulled the plug on their lawyers.

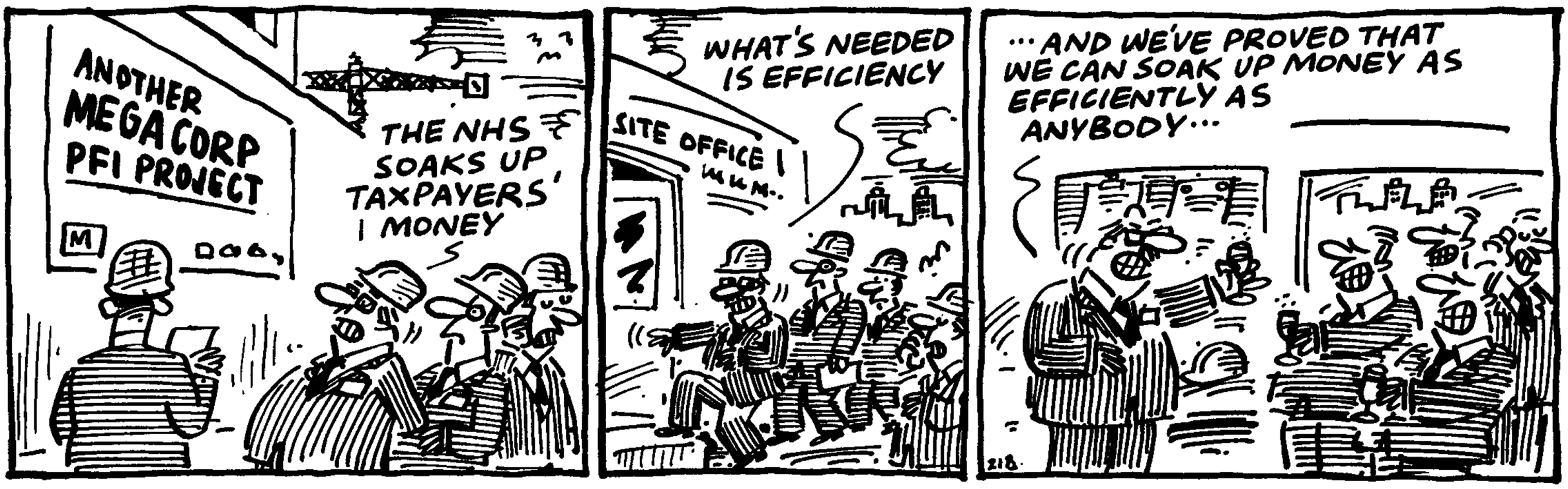
But for that decision – which the liquidators and lawyers initially resisted until told there was no prospect of success by a more assertive judge, Sir Andrew Morritt – the case would probably still be going on now. But then lawyers Lovells are estimated to have been paid £38m and liquidators Deloittes £56m while the Bank's legal costs are put at £81m.

Tomlinson, in his voluminous judgment as to why the Bank should have its full costs, makes clear he believed the case was flawed from day one. It was even more flawed after the liquidators' chief counsel Gordon (£3m Man) Pollock sat down after opening the case for 86 days. Even before the Bank's QC Nicholas Stadlen had replied for a further record 119 days Tomlinson believed it had "gone".

But Tomlinson still allowed two Bank officials to give evidence and be extensively cross-examined. His only intervention appeared to be to limit Pollock's ludicrous attempt to cross-examine former supervision chief Peter Cooke for 64 days!

Tomlinson and presumably Woolf decided amazingly that there was "nothing which could usefully be done" back in December 2004. This despite the "myriad hopeless inconsistencies and implausibilities in the liquidators' case"!

Why? Judges regularly stop trials on the basis that there is no case to answer or that the case


ANOTHER MEGACORP PFI PROJECT
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THE NHS SOAKS UP TAXPAYERS' MONEY
WHAT'S NEEDED IS EFFICIENCY
SITE OFFICE
MMM..
...AND WE'VE PROVED THAT WE CAN SOAK UP MONEY AS EFFICIENTLY AS ANYBODY...
218

fails for evidential or legal reasons and cannot possibly succeed. In criminal trials the defence regularly makes such submissions once the prosecution has finished presenting its case.

Yet Tomlinson made no attempt to halt the legal gravy train either when Pollock sat down or after Stadlen finished. Why not? He is the judge.

Had he stopped the case, all that the liquidators could have done would have been to appeal and on the basis of his and Woolf's judgment that would have been unlikely to succeed. But that requires confidence in your own judgment.

How was it possible for the case to so depart from the one allowed to go forward by the Law Lords as maintained by Tomlinson without that alone being reason to call a halt? Why did he allow Pollock and Stadlen to bang on for such record periods? After day 130 another plank of the "lamentable" case was "simply incoherent" yet still Tomlinson did nothing with a case he described as "hopeless". He sat silent even though Pollock and co-counsel Lord Neill made "diametrically opposed submissions".

The answer is that Tomlinson was no Judge Dread and appears to have been in awe of Pollock in particular. He complains about Pollock's behaviour towards Stadlen but did nothing to stop it. A more confident judge – such as those in US federal courts – would at least have told Pollock to sit down and shut up. Instead Pollock was allowed to rule Tomlinson's courtroom walking around hands often in pockets addressing the judge as he saw fit.

"Mr Pollock was only *infrequently* rude to me and I ignored it." Why? How was that supposed to improve matters? Why was Pollock allowed to get away with "sustained rudeness" to Stadlen that was "inappropriate and distracting"? "I should have done more to attempt to control it," Tomlinson pathetically moans. Too true.

But then Tomlinson was even prepared to accede that Pollock should be entitled to visit their club, the Garrick, more days than the judge – an arrangement to avoid embarrassment. Clearly judges could be inconvenienced more easily than eminent QCs.

Tomlinson complained about the arrogant way Pollock behaved and about the "unhelpful" manner in which he was not given information or clarification by BCCI counsel. But he did nothing. After one unhelpful exchange with Pollock, Tomlinson admitted that after day 204 "I stopped asking questions". The liquidator's barristers and lawyers were in Tomlinson's view "playing fast and loose with the court" but still he did not act. So the farce continued for another 103 days before in Tomlinson's own view an "inherently implausible" case based "not even on sand but rather on air" collapsed.

The sad fact is that – as in the Jubilee Line corruption trial, which also collapsed last year – a weak trial judge lost control of the proceedings and handed them over to the barristers. How else to explain the inability of a high court judge to control what happens in his courtroom?

Sadly, all too often British judges instead of deciding how a case is run and when and for how long allow the barristers, often juggling a myriad lucrative briefs, to dictate. Until that stops, fiascos like BCCI and Jubilee Line will be repeated.

The BCCI farce has delivered on Tomlinson's forecast that it "had the capacity to damage the reputation of our legal system". The question now is will anybody do anything to change who runs British courts?

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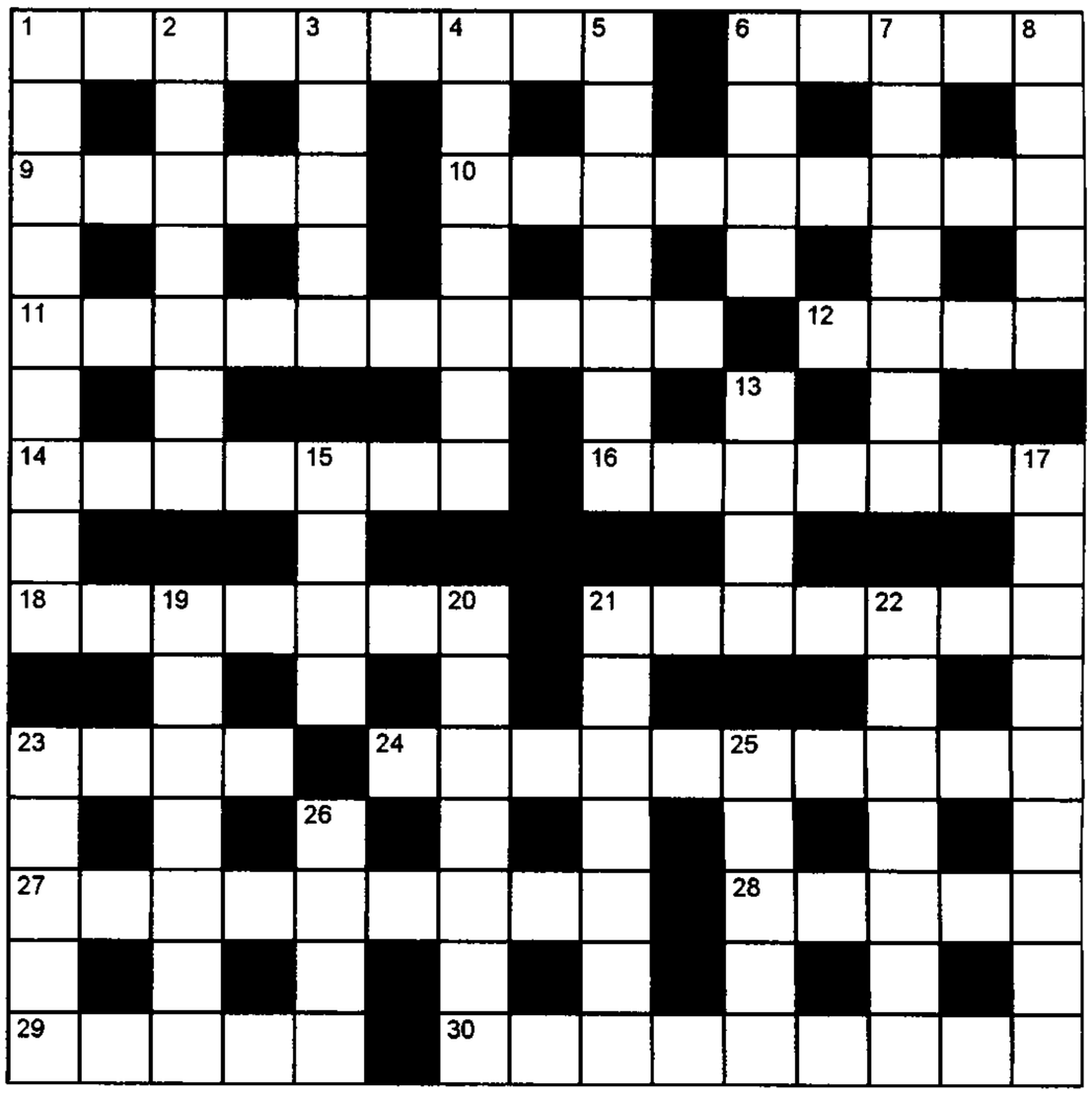
EYE CROSSWORD 312

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 5 May 2006

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

1 See 11ac.
6 Tumescent like a non-PC homosexual? (5)
9 Simpson gets order to penetrate hot Brenda (5)
10 Imagine very recently coupling with Caprice ... (4,5)
11/1ac./25 "Oh – Saudi overreaction!" – Blair, spinning government measure to deal with delinquency (4-6,9,5)
12 Extra! Andrew Motion briefly takes on Private Eye! (4)
14 Decrepit Iris cavorting with nun (2,5)
16 Show shagging doesn't start with *Hello!* piece (7)
18 Stick with froth as an oral irritation (7)
21 City bird's taken to drink (7)
23 Writer without pair to thrust out (4)
24 Gordon's prime, universal evil: "Tone moving without one to cut short parliamentary debate" ... (10)
27 ... raging: "Endless shit, endless bollocks, little entertainment!" (9)
28 Lord Owen's first drunken slobber (5)
29 Suit, old West Midlands Police style? (3,2)
30 High-ranking cops smear A-list celeb (9)

DOWN

1 Blow job in essence means removing a nut (9)
2 Freddie's pet dish showing a bit of thigh, having rest after being screwed? (7)
3 PC attacker game to be gobbled by short noble (5)
4 Is in opposition, so thing comes to point (7)
5 Teresa and head of Theology, writhing, come again (7)
6 See 23dn.
7 Something for addicts of blow job equipment and clobber (3,4)
8 Hey-hey! Sadie's top keeps going up and down! (2-3)
13 Islamic sect quiet over Iraq, oddly (4)
15 See 26dn.
17 Perhaps Polo Mint's last given to one getting knickers in a twist? (9)
19 Strong-smelling substance, "arse fur" (7)
20 They could go to a victor's head (Bush's) (7)
21 On leave, starts to uplift and pad bust (5,2)
22 Government-style gloss on events not allowed to prolong its life? (4,3)
23/6dn. Breathless, openly gay, related to a derisory gay (3,2,4)
25 See 11ac.
26/15 Do what a younger Schwarzenegger did: act like a wanker – smooth! (4,4)

Crossword 311 winner: NICHOLAS A. WALKER

ACROSS: 7 Bimbo 8 Does a bunk 10/5/4 St Albions Parish News 11 Ink in 12 The Beeb 14 Athlete 16/17/18 Cheap and nasty 19 Adapted 21 Desexed 23 Hague 25 Decadence 27 Martyrdom 28 Virus.

DOWN: 1 Emma 2 Double up 3 Idiot board 6 Yuck 7 Besot 9 Kennedy 13 Enema 14 Aide-de-camp 15/24 Essex girl 16 Chatham 18 Nosedive 20 The Eye 22 Dregs 25 Dude 26 Nark.

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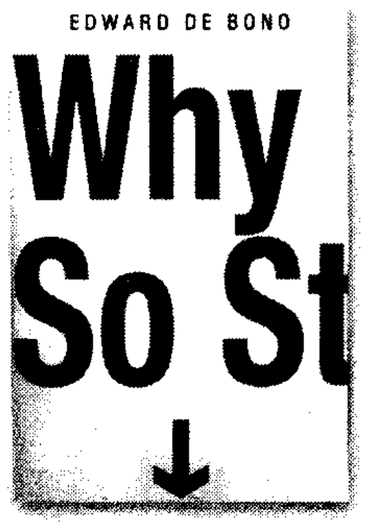
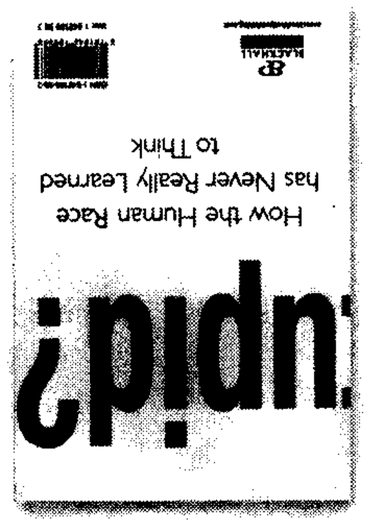


[FRONT]



[BACK]

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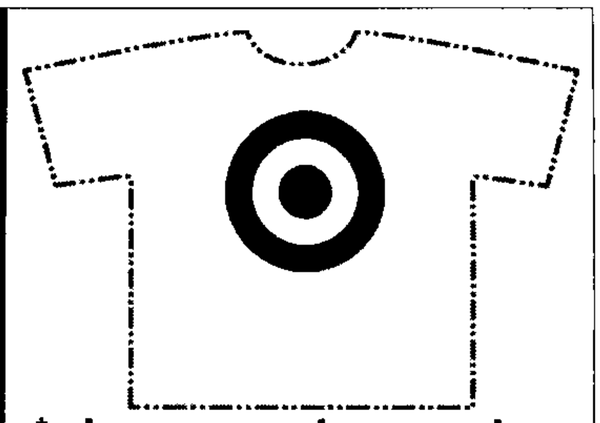

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